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RALPH THE HEIR BY ANTHONY TROLLOPE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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RALPH THE HEIR.

BY

ANTHONY TROLLOPE,

AUTHOR OF "FRAMLEY PARSONAGE," ETC.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1871.

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RALPH THE HEIR.

CHAPTER I.

Sir Thomas.

THERE are men who cannot communicate themselves to others, as there are also men who not only can do so, but cannot do otherwise. And it is hard to say which is the better man of the two. We do not specially respect him who wears his heart upon his sleeve for daws to peck at, who carries a crystal window to his bosom so that all can see the work that is going on within it, who cannot keep any affair of his own private, who gushes out in love and friendship to every chance acquaintance; but then, again, there is but little love given to him who is always wary, always silent as to his own belongings, who buttons himself in a suit of close reserve which he never loosens. Respect such a one may gain, but hardly love. It is natural to us to like to know the affairs of our friends; and natural also, I think, to like to talk of our own to those whom we trust. Perhaps, after all that may be said of the weakness of the gushing and indiscreet babbler, it is pleasanter to live with such a one than with the self-constrained reticent man of iron, whose conversation among his most intimate friends is solely of politics, of science, of literature, or

of some other subject equally outside the privacies of our inner life.

Sir Thomas Underwood, whom I, and I hope my readers also, will have to know very intimately, was one of those who are not able to make themselves known intimately to any. I am speaking now of a man of sixty, and I am speaking also of one who had never yet made a close friend,—who had never by unconscious and slow degrees of affection fallen into that kind of intimacy with another man which justifies and renders necessary mutual freedom of intercourse in all the affairs of life. And yet he was possessed of warm affections, was by no means misanthropic in his nature, and would, in truth, have given much to be able to be free and jocund as are other men. He lacked the power that way, rather than the will. To himself it seemed to be a weakness in him rather than a strength that he should always be silent, always guarded, always secret and dark. He had lamented it as an acknowledged infirmity;—as a man grieves that he should be short-sighted, or dull of hearing; but at the age of sixty he had taken no efficient steps towards curing himself of the evil, and had now abandoned all idea of any such cure.

Whether he had been, upon the whole, fortunate or unfortunate in life shall be left to the reader's judgment. But he certainly had not been happy. He had suffered cruel disappointments; and a disappointment will crush the spirit worse than a realised calamity. There is no actual misfortune in not being Lord Mayor of London; —but when a man has set his heart upon the place, has worked himself into a position within a few feet of the Mansion House, has become alderman with the

mayoralty before him in immediate rotation, he will suffer more at being passed over by the liverymen than if he had lost half his fortune. Now Sir Thomas Underwood had become Solicitor-General in his profession, but had never risen to the higher rank or more assured emoluments of other legal offices.

We will not quite trace our Meleager back to his egg, but we will explain that he was the only son of a barrister of moderate means, who put him to the Bar, and who died leaving little or nothing behind him. The young barrister had an only sister, who married an officer in the army, and who had passed all her latter life in distant countries to which her husband had been called by the necessity of living on the income which his profession gave him. As a Chancery barrister, Mr. Underwood,—our Sir Thomas,—had done well, living on the income he made, marrying at thirty-five, going into Parliament at forty-five, becoming Solicitor-General at fifty,—and ceasing to hold that much-desired office four months after his appointment. Such cessation, however, arising from political causes, is no disappointment to a man. It will doubtless be the case that a man so placed will regret the weakness of his party, which has been unable to keep the good things of Government in its hands; but he will recognise without remorse or sorrow the fact that the Ministry to which he has attached himself must cease to be a Ministry;—and there will be nothing in his displacement to gall his pride, or to create that inner feeling of almost insupportable mortification which comes from the conviction of personal failure. Sir Thomas Underwood had been Solicitor-General for a few months under a Conservative Prime

Minister; and when the Conservative Minister went out of office, Sir Thomas Underwood followed him with no feeling of regret that caused him unhappiness. But when afterwards the same party came back to power, and he, having lost his election at the borough which he had represented, was passed over without a word of sympathy or even of assumed regret from the Minister, then he was wounded. It was true, he knew, that a man, to be Solicitor-General, should have a seat in Parliament. The highest legal offices in the country are not to be attained by any amount of professional excellence, unless the candidate shall have added to such excellence the power of supporting a Ministry and a party in the House of Commons. Sir Thomas Underwood thoroughly understood this;—but he knew also that there are various ways in which a lame dog may be helped over a stile,—if only the lame dog be popular among dogs. For another ex-Solicitor-General a seat would have been found,—or some delay would have been granted,—or at least there would have been a consultation, with a suggestion that something should be tried. But in this case a man four years his junior in age, whom he despised, and who, as he was informed, had obtained his place in Parliament by gross bribery, was put into the office without a word of apology to him. Then he was unhappy, and acknowledged to himself that his spirit was crushed.

But he acknowledged to himself at the same time that he was one doomed by his nature to such crushing of the spirit if he came out of the hole of his solitude, and endeavoured to carry on the open fight of life among his fellow-men. He knew that he was one doomed to that disappointment, the bitterest of

all, which comes from failure when the prize has been all but reached. It is much to have become Solicitor-General, and that he had achieved;—but it is worse than nothing to have been Solicitor-General for four months, and then to find that all the world around one regards one as having failed, and as being, therefore, fit for the shelf. Such were Sir Thomas Underwood's feelings as he sat alone in his chambers during those days in which the new administration was formed, —in which days he was neither consulted nor visited, nor communicated with either by message or by letter. But all this,—this formation of a Ministry, in which the late Solicitor-General was not invited to take a part,—occurred seven years before the commencement of our story.

During those years in which our lawyer sat in Parliament as Mr. Underwood,—at which time he was working hard also as a Chancery barrister, and was, perhaps, nearer to his fellow-men than he had ever been before, or was ever destined to be afterwards,—he resided, as regarded himself almost nominally, at a small but pretty villa, which he had taken for his wife's sake at Fulham. It was close upon the river, and had well-arranged, though not extensive, shrubbery walks, and a little lawn, and a tiny conservatory, and a charming opening down to the Thames. Mrs. Underwood had found herself unable to live in Half-moon Street; and Mr. Underwood, not unwillingly, had removed his household gods to this retreat. At that time his household gods consisted of a wife and two daughters;—but the wife had died before the time came at which she could have taken on herself the name of Lady Underwood. The villa at Fulham was

still kept, and there lived the two girls, and there also Sir Thomas, had he been interrogated on the subject, would have declared that he also was domiciled. But if a man lives at the place in which he most often sleeps, Sir Thomas in truth lived at his chambers at Southampton Buildings. When he moved those household gods of his to the villa, it was necessary, because of his duties in Parliament, that he should have some place in town wherein he might lay his head, and therefore, I fear not unwillingly, he took to laying his head very frequently in the little bedroom which was attached to his chambers.

It is not necessary that we should go back to any feelings which might have operated upon him during his wife's lifetime, or during the period of his parliamentary career. His wife was now dead, and he no longer held a seat in Parliament. He had, indeed, all but abandoned his practice at the Bar, never putting himself forward for the ordinary business of a Chancery barrister. But, nevertheless, he spent the largest half of his life in his chambers, breakfasting there, reading there, writing there, and sleeping there. He did not altogether desert the lodge at Fulham, and the two girls who lived there. He would not even admit to them, or allow them to assert that he had not his home with them. Sometimes for two nights together, and sometimes for three, he would be at the villa,—never remaining there, however, during the day. But on Sundays it may almost be said that he was never at home. And hence arose the feeling that of all went the nearest to create discord between the father and the daughters. Sir Thomas was always in Southampton Buildings on Sundays. Did Sir

Thomas go to church? The Miss Underwoods did go to church very regularly, and thought much of the propriety and necessity of such Sunday exercises. They could remember that in their younger days their father always had been there with them. They could remember, indeed, that he, with something of sternness, would require from them punctuality and exactness in this duty. Now and again,—perhaps four times in the year,—he would go to the Rolls Chapel. So much they could learn. But they believed that beyond that his Sundays were kept holy by no attendance at divine service. And it may be said at once that they believed aright.

Sir Thomas's chambers in Southampton Buildings, though they were dull and dingy of aspect from the outside, and were reached by a staircase which may be designated as lugubrious,—so much did its dark and dismantled condition tend to melancholy,—were in themselves large and commodious. His bedroom was small, but he had two spacious sitting-rooms, one of which was fitted up as a library, and the other as a dining-room. Over and beyond these there was a clerk's room; for Sir Thomas, though he had given up the greater part of his business, had not given up his clerk; and here the old man, the clerk, passed his entire time, from half-past eight in the morning till ten at night, waiting upon his employer in various capacities with a sedulous personal attention to which he had probably not intended to devote himself when he first took upon himself the duties of clerk to a practising Chancery barrister. But Joseph Stemm and Sir Thomas were not unlike in character, and had grown old together with too equal a step to admit of

separation and of new alliance. Stemm had but one friend in the world, and Sir Thomas was that friend. I have already said that Sir Thomas had no friend; but perhaps he felt more of that true intimacy, which friendship produces, with Stemm than with any other human being.

Sir Thomas was a tall thin man, who stooped considerably,—though not from any effect of years, with a face which would perhaps have been almost mean had it not been rescued from that evil condition by the assurance of intelligence and strength which is always conveyed by a certain class of ugliness. He had a nose something like the great Lord Brougham's,—thin, long, and projecting at the point. He had quick grey eyes, and a good forehead;—but the component parts of his countenance were irregular and roughly put together. His chin was long, as was also his upper lip;—so that it may be taken as a fact that he was an ugly man. He was hale, however, and strong, and was still so good a walker that he thought nothing of making his way down to the villa on foot of an evening after dining at his club.

It was his custom to dine at his club, that highly respectable and most comfortable club situated at the corner of Suffolk Street, Pall Mall;—the senior of the two which are devoted to the well-being of scions of our great Universities. There Sir Thomas dined, perhaps four nights in the week, for ten months in the year. And it was said of him in the club that he had never been known to dine in company with another member of the club. His very manner as he sat at his solitary meal,—always with a pint of port on the table,—was as well known as the figure of the old

king on horseback outside in the street, and was as unlike the ordinary manner of men as is that unlike the ordinary figures of kings. He had always a book in his hand,—not a club book, nor a novel from Mudie's, nor a magazine, but some ancient and hard-bound volume from his own library, which he had brought in his pocket, and to which his undivided attention would be given. The eating of his dinner, which always consisted of the joint of the day and of nothing else, did not take him more than five minutes; —but he would sip his port wine slowly, would have a cup of tea which he would also drink very slowly,— and would then pocket his book, pay his bill, and would go. It was rarely the case that he spoke to any one in the club. He would bow to a man here and there, —and if addressed would answer; but of conversation at his club he knew nothing, and hardly ever went into any room but that in which his dinner was served to him.

In conversing about him men would express a wonder how such a one had ever risen to high office, —how, indeed, he could have thriven at his profession. But in such matters we are, all of us, too apt to form confident opinions on apparent causes which are near the surface, but which, as guides to character, are fallacious. Perhaps in all London there was no better lawyer, in his branch of law, than Sir Thomas Underwood. He had worked with great diligence; and though he was shy to a degree quite unintelligible to men in general in the ordinary intercourse of life, he had no feeling of diffidence when upon his legs in Court or in the House of Commons. With the Lord Chancellor's wife or daughters he could not exchange

five words with comfort to himself,—nor with his lordship himself in a drawing-room; but in Court the Lord Chancellor was no more to him than another lawyer whom he believed to be not so good a lawyer as himself. No man had ever succeeded in browbeating him when panoplied in his wig and gown; nor had words ever been wanting to him when so arrayed. It had been suggested to him by an attorney who knew him in that way in which attorneys ought to know barristers, that he should stand for a certain borough;—and he had stood and had been returned. Thrice he had been returned for the same town; but at last, when it was discovered that he would never dine with the leading townsmen, or call on their wives in London, or assist them in their little private views, the strength of his extreme respectability was broken down,—and he was rejected. In the meantime he was found to be of value by the party to which he had attached himself. It was discovered that he was not only a sound lawyer, but a man of great erudition, who had studied the experience of history as well as the wants of the present age. He was one who would disgrace no Government,—and he was invited to accept the office of Solicitor-General by a Minister who had never seen him out of the House of Commons. "He is as good a lawyer as there is in England," said the Lord Chancellor. "He always speaks with uncommon clearness," said the Chancellor of the Exchequer. "I never saw him talking with a human being," said the Secretary to the Treasury, deprecating the appointment. "He will soon get over that complaint with your assistance," said the Minister, laughing. So Mr. Underwood became Solicitor General and Sir Thomas; and

he so did his work that no doubt he would have returned to his office had he been in Parliament when his party returned to power. But he had made no friend, he had not learned to talk even to the Secretary of the Treasury; and when the party came back to power he was passed over without remorse, and almost without a regret.

He never resumed the active bustle of his profession after that disappointment. His wife was then dead, and for nearly a twelvemonth he went about, declaring to attorneys and others that his professional life was done. He did take again to a certain class of work when he came back to the old chambers in Southampton Buildings; but he was seen in Court only rarely, and it was understood that he wished it to be supposed that he had retired. He had ever been a moderate man in his mode of living, and had put together a sum of money sufficient for moderate wants. He possessed some twelve or fourteen hundred a year independant of anything that he might now earn; and, as he had never been a man greedy of money, so was he now more indifferent to it than in his earlier days. It is a mistake, I think, to suppose that men become greedy as they grow old. The avaricious man will show his avarice as he gets into years, because avarice is a passion compatible with old age,—and will become more avaricious as his other passions fall off from him. And so will it be with the man that is open-handed. Mr. Underwood, when struggling at the Bar, had fought as hard as any of his compeers for comfort and independence; but money, as money, had never been dear to him; and now he was so trained a philosopher that he dis-

regarded it altogether, except as far as it enabled him to maintain his independence.

On a certain Friday evening in June, as he sat at dinner at his club, instead of applying himself to his book, which according to his custom he had taken from his pocket, he there read a letter, which as soon as read he would restore to the envelope, and would take it out again after a few moments of thought. At last, when the cup of tea was done and the bill was paid, he put away letter and book together and walked to the door of his club. When there, he stood and considered what next should he do that evening. It was now past eight o'clock, and how should he use the four, five, or perhaps six hours which remained to him before he should go to bed? The temptation to which he was liable prompted him to return to his solitude in Southampton Buildings. Should he do so, he would sleep till ten in his chair,—then he would read, and drink more tea, or perhaps write, till one; and after that he would prowl about the purlieus of Chancery Lane, the Temple, and Lincoln's Inn, till two or even three o'clock in the morning;—looking up at the old dingy windows, and holding, by aid of those powers which imagination gave him, long intercourse with men among whom a certain weakness in his physical organisation did not enable him to live in the flesh. Well the policemen knew him as he roamed about, and much they speculated as to his roamings. But in these night wanderings he addressed no word to any one; nor did any one ever address a word to him. Yet the world, perhaps, was more alive to him then than at any other period in the twenty-four hours.

But on the present occasion the temptation was resisted. He had not been at home during the whole week, and knew well that he ought to give his daughters the countenance of his presence. Whether that feeling alone would have been sufficient to withdraw him from the charms of Chancery Lane and send him down to the villa may be doubted; but there was that in the letter which he had perused so carefully which he knew must be communicated to his girls. His niece, Mary Bonner, was now an orphan, and would arrive in England from Jamaica in about a fortnight. Her mother had been Sir Thomas's sister, and had been at this time dead about three years. General Bonner, the father, had now died, and the girl was left an orphan, almost penniless, and with no near friend unless the Underwoods would befriend her. News of the General's death had reached Sir Thomas before;—and he had already made inquiry as to the fate of his niece through her late father's agents. Of the General's means he had known absolutely nothing,—believing, however, that they were confined to his pay as an officer. Now he was told that the girl would be at Southampton in a fortnight, and that she was utterly destitute. He declared to himself as he stood on the steps of the club that he would go home and consult his daughters;—but his mind was in fact made up as to his niece's fate long before he got home,—before he turned out of Pall Mall into St. James's Park. He would sometimes talk to himself of consulting his daughters; but in truth he very rarely consulted any human being as to what he would do or leave undone. If he went straight, he went straight without other human light than such as

was given to him by his own intellect, his own heart, and his own conscience. It took him about an hour and a half to reach his home, but of that time four-fifths were occupied, not in resolving what he would do in this emergency, but in deep grumblings and regrets that there should be such a thing to be done at all. All new cares were grievous to him. Nay;—old cares were grievous, but new cares were terrible. Though he was bold in deciding, he was very timid in looking forward as to the results of that decision. Of course the orphan girl must be taken into his house; and of course he must take upon himself the duty of a father in regard to her.

CHAPTER II.

Popham Villa.

POPHAM VILLA was the name of the house at Fulham,—as was to be seen by all men passing by, for it was painted up conspicuously on the pillars through which the gate led into the garden. Mr. Underwood, when he had first taken the place, had wished to expunge the name, feeling it to be cockneyfied, pretentious, and unalluring. But Mrs. Underwood had rather liked it, and it remained. It was a subject of ridicule with the two girls; but they had never ventured to urge its withdrawal, and after his wife's death Sir Thomas never alluded to the subject. Popham Villa it was, therefore, and there the words remained. The house was unpretentious, containing only two sitting-rooms besides a small side closet,—for it could hardly be called more,—which the girls even in their mother's lifetime had claimed as their own. But the drawing-

room was as pretty as room could be, opening on to the lawn with folding windows, and giving a near view of the bright river as it flowed by, with just a glimpse of the bridge. That and the dining-room and the little closet were all on the ground floor, and above were at any rate as many chambers as the family required. The girls desired no better house,—if only their father could be with them. But he would urge that his books were all in London; and that, even were he willing to move them, there was no room for them in Popham Villa.

It was sad enough for the two girls,—this kind of life. The worst of it, perhaps, was this; that they never knew when to expect him. A word had been said once as to the impracticability of having dinner ready for a gentleman, when the gentleman would never say whether he would want a dinner. It had been an unfortunate remark, for Sir Thomas had taken advantage of it by saying that when he came he would come after dinner, unless he had certified to the contrary beforehand. Then, after dinner, would come on him the temptation of returning to his chambers, and so it would go on with him from day to day.

On this Friday evening the girls almost expected him, as he rarely let a week pass without visiting them, and still rarely came to them on a Saturday. He found them out upon the lawn, or rather on the brink of the river, and with them was standing a young man whom he knew well. He kissed each of the girls, and then gave his hand to the young man. "I am glad to see you, Ralph," he said. "Have you been here long?"

"As much as an hour or two, I fear. Patience

will tell you. I meant to have got back by the 9.15 from Putney; but I have been smoking, and dreaming, and talking, till now it is nearly ten."

"There is a train at 10.30," said the eldest Miss Underwood.

"And another at 11.15," said the young man.

Sir Thomas was especially anxious to be alone with his daughters, but he could not tell the guest to go. Nor was he justified in feeling any anger at his presence there,—though he did experience some prick of conscience in the matter. If it was wrong that his daughters should be visited by a young man in his absence, the fault lay in his absence, rather than with the young man for coming, or with the girls for receiving him. The young man had been a ward of his own, and for a year or two in former times had been so intimate in his house as to live with his daughters almost as an elder brother might have done. But young Ralph Newton had early in life taken rooms for himself in London, had then ceased to be a ward, and had latterly,—so Sir Thomas understood,—lived such a life as to make him unfit to be the trusted companion of his two girls. And yet there had been nothing in his mode of living to make it necessary that he should be absolutely banished from the villa. He had spent more money than was fitting, and had got into debt, and Sir Thomas had had trouble about his affairs. He too was an orphan,—and the nephew and heir of an old country squire whom he never saw. What money he had received from his father he had nearly spent, and it was rumoured of him that he had raised funds by post-obits on his uncle's life. Of all these things more will be told hereafter;—but Sir Tho-

mas,—though he had given no instruction on the subject, and was averse even to allude to it,—did not like to think that Ralph Newton was at the villa with the girls in his absence. His girls were as good as gold. He was sure of that. He told himself over and over again that were it not so, he would not have left them so constantly without his own care. Patience, the elder, was a marvel among young women for prudence, conduct, and proper feeling; and Clarissa, whom he had certainly ever loved the better of the two, was as far as he knew faultless;—a little more passionate, a little warmer, somewhat more fond of pleasure than her sister; but on that account only the more to be loved. Nothing that he could do would make them safer than they would be by their own virtue. But still he was not pleased to think that Ralph Newton was often at the villa. When a man such as Sir Thomas has been entrusted with the charge of a young man with great expectations, he hardly wishes his daughter to fall in love with his ward, whether his ward be prudent or imprudent in his manner of life.

Sir Thomas was hot and tired after his walk, and there was some little fuss in getting him soda-water and tea. And as it was plain to see that things were not quite comfortable, Ralph Newton at last took his departure, so as to catch the earlier of the two trains which had been mentioned. It was, nevertheless, past ten when he went;—and then Sir Thomas, sitting at the open window of the drawing-room, again took out the letter. "Patience," he said addressing his elder daughter as he withdrew the enclosure from the envelope, "Mary Bonner will be in England in a fortnight. What shall we do for her?" As he spoke he held the

letter in a manner which justified the girl in taking it from his hand. He allowed it to go to her, and she read it before she answered him.

It was a very sad letter, cold in its language, but still full of pathos. Her friends in the West Indies,—such friends as she had,—had advised her to proceed to England. She was given to understand that when her father's affairs should be settled there would be left to her not more than a few hundred pounds. Would her uncle provide for her some humble home for the present, and assist her in her future endeavours to obtain employment as a governess? She could, she thought, teach music and French, and would endeavour to fit herself for the work of tuition in other respects. "I know," she said, "how very slight is my claim upon one who has never seen me, and who is connected with me only by my poor mother;—but perhaps you will allow me to trouble you so far in my great distress."

"She must come here, of course, papa," said Patience, as she handed the letter to Clarissa.

"Yes, she must come here," said Sir Thomas.

"But I mean, to stay,—for always."

"Yes,—to stay for always. I cannot say that the arrangement is one to which I look forward with satisfaction. A man does not undertake new duties without fears;—and especially not such a duty as this, to which I can see no end, and which I may probably be quite unable to perform."

"Papa, I am sure she will be nice," said Clarissa.

"But why are you sure, my dear? We will not argue that, however. She must come; and we will hope that she will prove to be what Clarissa calls nice.

I cannot allow my sister's child to go out into the world as a governess while I have a home to offer her. She must come here as one of our household. I only hope she will not interfere with your happiness."

"I am sure she will not," said Clarissa.

"We will determine that she shall add to it, and will do our best to make her happy," said Patience.

"It is a great risk, but we must run it," said Sir Thomas; and so the matter was settled. Then he explained to them that he intended to go himself to Southampton to receive his niece, and that he would bring her direct from that port to her new home. Patience offered to accompany him on the journey, but this he declined as unnecessary. Everything was decided between them by eleven o'clock,—even to the room which Mary Bonner should occupy, and then the girls left their father, knowing well that he would not go to bed for the next four hours. He would sleep in his chair for the next two hours, and would then wander about, or read, or perhaps sit and think of this added care till the night would be half over. Nor did the two sisters go to bed at once. This new arrangement, so important to their father, was certainly of more importance to them. He, no doubt, would still occupy his chambers, would still live practically alone in London, though he was in theory the presiding genius of the household at Fulham; but they must take to themselves a new sister; and they both knew, in spite of Clarissa's enthusiasm, that it might be that the new sister would be one whom they could not love.

"I don't remember that I ever heard a word about her," said Clarissa.

"I have been told that she is pretty. I do remember that," said Patience.

"How old is she? Younger than we, I suppose?" Now Clarissa Underwood at this time was one and twenty, and Patience was nearly two years her senior.

"Oh, yes;—about nineteen, I should say. I think I have been told that there were four or five older than Mary, who all died. Is it not strange and terrible,—to be left alone, the last of a large family, with not a relation whom one has ever seen?"

"Poor dear girl!"

"If she wrote the letter herself," continued Patience, "I think she must be clever."

"I am sure I could not have written a letter at all in such a position," said Clarissa. And so they sat, almost as late as their father, discussing the probable character and appearance of this new relation, and the chance of their being able to love her with all their hearts. There was the necessity for an immediate small sacrifice, but as to that there was no difficulty. Hitherto the two sisters had occupied separate bedrooms, but now, as one chamber must be given up to the stranger, it would be necessary that they should be together. But there are sacrifices which entail so little pain that the pleasant feeling of sacrificial devotion much more than atones for the consequences.

Patience Underwood, the elder and the taller of the two girls, was certainly not pretty. Her figure was good, her hands and feet were small, and she was in all respects like a lady; but she possessed neither the feminine loveliness which comes so often simply from youth, nor that other, rarer beauty, which be-

longs to the face itself, and is produced by its own lines and its own expression. Her countenance was thin, and might perhaps have been called dry and hard. She was very like her father,—without, however, her father's nose, and the redeeming feature of her face was to be found in that sense of intelligence which was conveyed by her bright grey eyes. There was the long chin, and there was the long upper lip, which, exaggerated in her father's countenance, made him so notoriously plain a man. And then her hair, though plentiful and long, did not possess that shining lustre which we love to see in girls, and which we all recognise as one of the sweetest graces of girlhood. Such, outwardly, was Patience Underwood; and of all those who knew her well there was not one so perfectly satisfied that she did want personal attraction as was Patience Underwood herself. But she never spoke on the subject,—even to her sister. She did not complain; neither, as is much more common, did she boast that she was no beauty. Her sister's loveliness was very dear to her, and of that she would sometimes break out into enthusiastic words. But of herself, externally, she said nothing. Her gifts, if she had any, were of another sort; and she was by no means willing to think of herself as one unendowed with gifts. She was clever, and knew herself to be clever. She could read, and understood what she read. She saw the difference between right and wrong, and believed that she saw it clearly. She was not diffident of herself, and certainly was not unhappy. She had a strong religious faith, and knew how to supplement the sometimes failing happiness of this world, by trusting in the happiness of the next. Were

it not for her extreme anxiety in reference to her father, Patience Underwood would have been a happy woman.

Clarissa, the younger, was a beauty. The fact that she was a beauty was acknowledged by all who knew her, and was well known to herself. It was a fact as to which there had never been a doubt since she was turned fifteen. She was somewhat shorter than her sister, and less slender. She was darker in complexion, and her hair, which was rich in colour as brown hair can be, was lustrous, silky, and luxuriant. She wore it now, indeed, according to the fashion of the day, with a chignon on her head; but beneath that there were curls which escaped, and over her forehead it was clipped short, and was wavy, and impertinent,—as is also the fashion of the day. Such as it was, she so wore it that a man could hardly wish it to be otherwise. Her eyes, unlike those of her father and sister, were blue; and in the whole contour of her features there was nothing resembling theirs. The upper lip was short, and the chin was short and dimpled. There was a dimple on one cheek too, a charm so much more maddening than when it is to be seen on both sides alike. Her nose was perfect; —not Grecian, nor Roman, nor Egyptian,—but simply English, only just not retroussé. There were those who said her mouth was a thought too wide, and her teeth too perfect,—but they were of that class of critics to whom it is a necessity to cavil rather than to kiss. Added to all this there was a childishness of manner about her of which, though she herself was somewhat ashamed, all others were enamoured. It was not the childishness of very youthful years,—for

she had already reached the mature age of twenty-one; but the half-doubting, half-pouting, half-yielding, half-obstinate, soft, loving, lovable childishness, which gives and exacts caresses, and which, when it is genuine, may exist to an age much beyond that which Clarissa Underwood had reached.

But with all her charms, Clarissa was not so happy a girl as her sister. And for this lack of inward satisfaction there were at this time two causes. She believed herself to be a fool, and was in that respect jealous of her sister;—and she believed herself to be in love, and in love almost without hope. As to her foolishness, it seemed to her to be a fact admitted by every one but by Patience herself. Not a human being came near her who did not seem to imply that any question as to wisdom or judgment or erudition between her and her sister would be a farce. Patience could talk Italian, could read German, knew, at least by name, every poet that had ever written, and was always able to say exactly what ought to be done. She could make the servants love her and yet obey her, and could always dress on her allowance without owing a shilling. Whereas Clarissa was obeyed by no one, was in debt to her boot-maker and milliner, and, let her struggles in the cause be as gallant as they might, could not understand a word of Dante, and was aware that she read the "Faery Queen" exactly as a child performs a lesson. As to her love, —there was a sharper sorrow. Need the reader be told that Ralph Newton was the hero to whom its late owner believed that her heart had been given? This was a sore subject, which had never as yet been mentioned frankly even between the two sisters. In truth,

though Patience thought that there was a fancy, she did not think that there was much more than fancy. And, as far as she could see, there was not even fancy on the young man's part. No word had been spoken that could be accepted as an expression of avowed love. So at least Patience believed. And she would have been very unhappy had it been otherwise, for Ralph Newton was not,—in her opinion,—a man to whose love her sister could be trusted with confidence. And yet, beyond her father and sister, there was no one whom Patience loved as she did Ralph Newton.

There had, however, been a little episode in the life of Clarissa Underwood, which had tended to make her sister uneasy, and which the reader may as well hear at once. There was a second Newton, a younger brother,—but, though younger, not only in orders, but in the possession of a living, Gregory Newton,—the Rev. Gregory Newton,—who in the space of a few weeks' acquaintance had fallen into a fury of love for Clarissa, and in the course of three months had made her as many offers, and had been as often refused. This had happened in the winter and spring previous to the opening of our story,—and both Patience and Sir Thomas had been well disposed towards the young man's suit. He had not been committed to Sir Thomas's charge, as had Ralph, having been brought up under the care of the uncle whose heir Ralph was through the obligation of legal settlements. This uncle, having quarrelled with his own brother, since dead, and with his heir, had nevertheless taken his other nephew by the hand, and had bestowed upon the young clergyman the living of Newton. Gregory Newton had been brought to the villa by his brother, and

had at once fallen on his knees before the beauty. But the beauty would have none of him, and he had gone back to his living in Hampshire a broken-hearted priest and swain. Now Patience, though she had never been directly so informed, feared that some partiality for the unworthy Ralph had induced her sister to refuse offers from the brother, who certainly was worthy. To the thinking of Patience Underwood, no lot in life could be happier for a woman than to be the wife of a zealous and praiseworthy parson of an English country parish;—no lot in life, at least, could be happier for any woman who intended to become a wife.

Such were the two girls at Popham Villa who were told on that evening that a new sister was to be brought home to them. When the next morning came they were of course still full of the subject. Sir Thomas was to go into London after breakfast, and he intended to walk over the bridge and catch an early train. He was as intent on being punctual to time as though he were bound to be all day in Court; and, fond as he might be of his daughters, had already enjoyed enough of the comforts of home to satisfy his taste. He did love his daughters;—but even with them he was not at his ease. The only society he could enjoy was that of his books or of his own thoughts, and the only human being whom he could endure to have long near him with equanimity was Joseph Stemm. He had risen at nine, as was his custom, and before ten he was bustling about with his hat and gloves.

"Papa," said Clarissa, "when shall you be home again?"

"I can't name a day, my dear."

"Papa, do come soon."

"No doubt I shall come soon."

There was a slight tone of anger in his voice as he answered the last entreaty, and he was evidently in a hurry with his hat and gloves.

"Papa," said Patience, "of course we shall see you again before you go to Southampton." The voice of the elder was quite different from that of the younger daughter; and Sir Thomas, though the tone and manner of the latter question was injurious to him, hardly dared to resent it. Yet they were not, as he thought, justified. It now wanted twelve days to the date of his intended journey, and not more than three or four times in his life had he been absent from home for twelve consecutive days.

"Yes, my dear," he said, "I shall be home before that."

"Because, papa, there are things to be thought of."

"What things?"

"Clarissa and I had better have a second bed in our room,—unless you object."

"You know I don't object. Have I ever objected to anything of the kind?" He now stood impatient, with his hat in his hand.

"I hardly like to order things without telling you, papa. And there are a few other articles of furniture needed."

"You can get what you want. Run up to town and go to Barlow's. You can do that as well as I can."

"But I should have liked to have settled something about our future way of living before Mary comes," said Patience in a very low voice.

Sir Thomas frowned, and then he answered her very slowly. "There can be nothing new settled at all. Things will go on as they are at present. And I hope, Patience, you will do your best to make your cousin understand and receive favourably the future home which she will have to inhabit."

"You may be sure, papa, I shall do my best," said Patience;—and then Sir Thomas went.

He did return to the villa before his journey to Southampton, but it was only on the eve of that journey. During the interval the two girls together had twice sought him at his chambers,—a liberty on their part which, as they well knew, he did not at all approve. "Sir Thomas is very busy," old Stemm would say, shaking his head, even to his master's daughters, "and if you wouldn't mind——" Then he would make a feint as though to close the door, and would go through various manœuvres of defence before he would allow the fort to be stormed. But Clarissa would ridicule old Stemm to his face, and Patience would not allow herself to be beaten by him. On their second visit they did make their way into their father's sanctum,—and they never knew whether in truth he had been there when they called before. "Old Stemm doesn't in the least mind what lies he tells," Clarissa had said. To this Patience made no reply, feeling that the responsibility for those figments might not perhaps lie exclusively on old Stemm's shoulders.

"My dears, this is such an out-of-the-way place for you," Sir Thomas said, as soon as the girls had made good their entrance. But the girls had so often gone through all this before, that they now regarded but

little what ejaculations of that nature were made to them.

"I have come to show you this list, papa," said Patience. Sir Thomas took the list, and found that it contained various articles for bedroom and kitchen use, —towels, sheets, pots and pans, knives and forks, and even a set of curtains and a carpet.

"I shouldn't have thought that a girl of eighteen would have wanted all these things,—a new corkscrew, for instance,—but if she does, as I told you before, you must get them."

"Of course they are not all for Mary," said Patience.

"The fact is, papa," said Clarissa, "you never do look to see how things are getting worn out."

"Clarissa!" exclaimed the angry father.

"Indeed, papa, if you were more at home and saw these things," began Patience——

"I have no doubt it is all right. Get what you want. Go to Barlow's and to Green's, and to Block and Blowhard. Don't let there be any bills, that's all. I will give you cheques when you get the accounts. And now, my dears,—I am in the middle of work which will not bear interruption." Then they left him, and when he did come to the villa on the evening before his journey, most of the new articles, including the corkscrew,—were already in the house.

CHAPTER III.

What happened on the Lawn at Popham Villa.

SIR THOMAS started for Southampton on a Friday, having understood that the steamer from St. Thomas would reach the harbour on Saturday morning. He would then immediately bring Mary Bonner up to London and down to Fulham;—and there certainly had come to be a tacit understanding that he would stay at home on the following Sunday. On the Friday evening the girls were alone at the villa; but there was nothing in this, as it was the life to which they were accustomed. They habitually dined at two, calling the meal lunch,—then had a five or six o'clock tea,—and omitted altogether the ceremony of a dinner. They had local acquaintances, with whom occasionally they would spend their evenings; and now and then an old maid or two,—now and then also a young maid or two would drop in on them. But it was their habit to be alone. During these days of which we are speaking Clarissa would take her "Faery Queen," and would work hard perhaps for half an hour. Then the "Faery Queen" would be changed for a novel, and she would look up from her book to see whether Patience had turned upon her any glance of reprobation. Patience, in the meantime, would sit with unsullied conscience at her work. And so the evenings would glide by; and in these soft summer days the girls would sit out upon the lawn, and would watch the boats of London watermen as they passed up and down below the bridge. On this very evening, the last on which they were to be together before the arrival of their cousin,

—Patience came out upon the lawn with her hat and gloves. "I am going across to Miss Spooner's," she said; "will you come?" But Clarissa was idle, and making some little joke, not very much to the honour of Miss Spooner, declared that she was hot and tired, and had a headache, and would stay at home. "Don't be long, Patty," she said; "it is such a bore to be alone." Patience promised a speedy return, and, making her way to the gate, crossed the road to Miss Spooner's abode. She was hardly out of sight when the nose of a wager boat was driven up against the bank, and there was Ralph Newton, sitting in a blue Jersey shirt, with a straw hat and the perspiration running from his handsome brow. Clarissa did not see him till he whistled to her, and then she started, and laughed, and ran down to the boat, and hardly remembered that she was quite alone, till she had taken his hand. "I don't think I'll come out, but you must get me some soda-water and brandy," said Ralph. "Where's Patience?"

"Patience has gone out to see an old maid; and we haven't got any brandy."

"I am so hot," said Ralph, carefully extricating himself from the boat. "You have got sherry?"

"Yes, we've got sherry, and port wine, and Gladstone;" and away she went to get him such refreshment as the villa possessed.

He drank his sherry and soda-water, and lit his pipe, and lay there on the lawn, as though he were quite at home; and Clarissa ministered to him,—unconscious of any evil. He had been brought up with them on terms of such close intimacy that she was entitled to regard him as a brother,—almost as a

brother,—if only she were able so to regard him. It was her practice to call him Ralph, and her own name was as common to him as though she were in truth his sister. "And what do you think of this new cousin?" he asked.

"I can think nothing as yet;—but I mean to like her."

"I mean to hate her furiously," said Ralph.

"That is nonsense. She will be nothing to you. You needn't even see her unless you please. But, Ralph, do put your jacket on. I'm sure you'll catch cold." And she went down, and hooked his jacket for him out of the boat, and put it over his shoulders. "I won't have you throw it off," she said; "if you come here you must do as you're told."

"You needn't have knocked the pipe out of my mouth all the same. What is she like, I wonder?"

"Very,—very beautiful, I'm told."

"A kind of tropical Venus,—all eyes, and dark skin, and black hair, and strong passions, and apt to murder people;—but at the same time so lazy that she is never to do anything either for herself or anybody else;—wouldn't fetch a fellow's jacket for him, let him be catching cold ever so fast."

"She wouldn't fetch yours, I dare say."

"And why shouldn't she?"

"Because she doesn't know you."

"They soon get to know one,—girls of that sort. I'm told that in the West Indies you become as thick as thieves in half a morning's flirtation, and are expected to propose at the second meeting."

"That is not to be your way with our cousin, I can assure you."

"But these proposals out there never mean much. You may be engaged to half-a-dozen girls at the same time, and be sure that each of them will be engaged to half-a-dozen men. There's some comfort in that, you know."

"Oh, Ralph!"

"That's what they tell me. I haven't been there. I shall come and look at her, you know."

"Of course you will."

"And if she is very lovely——"

"What then?"

"I do like pretty girls, you know."

"I don't know anything about it."

"I wonder what Uncle Gregory would say if I were to marry a West Indian! He wouldn't say much to me, because we never speak, but he'd lead poor Greg a horrid life. He'd be sure to think she was a nigger, or at least a creole. But I shan't do that."

"You might do worse, Ralph."

"But I might do much better." As he said this, he looked up into her face, with all the power of his eyes, and poor Clarissa could only blush. She knew what he meant, and knew that she was showing him that she was conscious. She would have given much not to blush, and not to have been so manifestly conscious, but she had no power to control herself. "I might do much better," he said. "Don't you think so?"

As far as she could judge of her own feelings at this moment, in the absolute absence of any previous accurate thought on the subject, she fancied that a real, undoubted, undoubting, trustworthy engagement with Ralph Newton would make her the happiest girl

in England. She had never told herself that she was in love with him; she had never flattered herself that he was in love with her;—she had never balanced the matter in her mind as a contingency likely to occur; but now, at this moment, as he lay there smoking his pipe and looking full into her blushing face, she did think that to have him for her own lover would be joy enough for her whole life. She knew that he was idle, extravagant, fond of pleasure, and,—unsteady, as she in her vocabulary would be disposed to describe the character which she believed to be his. But in her heart of hearts she liked unsteadiness in men, if it were not carried too far. Ralph's brother, the parson, as to whom she was informed that he possessed every virtue incident to humanity, and who was quite as good-looking as his brother, had utterly failed to touch her heart. A black coat and a white cravat were antipathetic to her. Ralph, as he lay on the green sward, hot, with linen trousers and a coloured flannel shirt, with a small straw hat stuck on the edge of his head, with nothing round his throat, and his jacket over his shoulder, with a pipe in his mouth and an empty glass beside him, was to her, in externals, the beau-ideal of a young man. And then, though he was unsteady, extravagant, and idle, his sins were not so deep as to exclude him from her father's and her sister's favour. He was there, on the villa lawn, not as an interloper, but by implied permission. Though she made for herself no argument on the matter,—not having much time just now for arguing,—she felt that it was her undoubted privilege to be made love to by Ralph Newton, if he and she pleased so to amuse themselves. She had never been told not to be made love to by

him. Of course she would not engage herself without her father's permission. Of course she would tell Patience if Ralph should say anything very special to her. But she had a right to be made love to if she liked it;—and in this case she would like it. But when Ralph looked at her, and asked her whether he might not do better than marry her West Indian cousin, she had not a word with which to answer him. He smoked on for some seconds in silence still looking at her, while she stood over him blushing. Then he spoke again. "I think I might do a great deal better." But still she had not a word for him.

"Ah;—I suppose I must be off," he said, jumping up on his legs, and flinging his jacket over his arm. "Patience will be in soon."

"I expect her every minute."

"If I were to say,—something uncivil about Patience, I suppose you wouldn't like it?"

"Certainly, I shouldn't like it."

"Only just to wish she were at,—Jericho?"

"Nonsense, Ralph."

"Yes; that would be nonsense. And the chances are, you know, that you would be at Jericho with her. Dear, dear Clary, you know I love you." Then he put his right arm round her waist, pipe and all, and kissed her.

She certainly had expected no such assault,—had not only not thought of it, but had not known it to be among the possibilities that might occur to her. She had never been so treated before. One other lover she had had,—as we know; but by him she had been treated with the deference due by an inferior to a superior being. It would have been very nice if Ralph

would have told her that he loved her,—but this was not nice. That had been done which she would not dare to tell to Patience,—which she could not have endured that Patience should have seen. She was bound to resent it;—but how? She stood silent for a moment, and then burst into tears. "You are not angry with me, Clary?" he said.

"I am angry;—very angry. Go away. I will never speak to you again."

"You know how dearly I love you."

"I don't love you at all. You have insulted me, and I will never forgive you. Go away." At this moment the step of Patience coming up from the gate was heard upon the gravel. Clarissa's first thought when she heard it was to hide her tears. Though the man had injured her,—insulted her,—her very last resource would be to complain to others of the injury or the insult. It must be hidden in her own breast,—but remembered always. Forgotten it could not be,—nor, as she thought at the moment, forgiven. But, above all, it must not be repeated. As to any show of anger against the sinner, that was impossible to her, because it was so necessary that the sin should be hidden.

"What;—Ralph? Have you been here long?" asked Patience, looking with somewhat suspicious eyes at Clarissa's back, which was turned to her.

"About half an hour,—waiting for you, and smoking and drinking soda-water. I have a boat here, and I must be off now."

"You'll have the tide with you," said Clarissa, with an effort.

"There is a tide in the affairs of men," said Ralph,

with a forced laugh. "My affairs shall at once take advantage of this tide. I'll come again very soon to see the new cousin. Good-bye, girls." Then he inserted himself into his boat, and took himself off, without bestowing even anything of a special glance upon Clarissa.

"Is there anything the matter?" Patience asked.

"No;—only why did you stay all the evening with that stupid old woman, when you promised me that you would be back in ten minutes?"

"I said nothing about ten minutes, Clary; and, after all, I haven't been an hour gone. Miss Spooner is in trouble about her tenant, who won't pay the rent, and she had to tell me all about it."

"Stupid old woman!"

"Have you and Ralph been quarrelling, Clary?"

"No;—why should we quarrel?"

"There seems to have been something wrong."

"It's so stupid being found all alone here. It makes one feel that one is so desolate. I do wish papa would live with us like other girls' fathers. As he won't, it would be much better not to let people come at all."

Patience was sure that something had happened,—and that that something must have reference to the guise of lover either assumed or not assumed by Ralph Newton. She accused her sister of no hypocrisy, but she was aware that Clarissa's words were wild, not expressing the girl's thoughts, and spoken almost at random. Something must be said, and therefore these complaints had been made. "Clary, dear, don't you like Ralph?" she asked.

"No. That is;—oh yes, I like him, of course. My head aches, and I'll go to bed."

"Wait a few minutes, Clary. Something has disturbed you. Has it not?"

"Everything disturbs me."

"But if there is anything special, won't you tell me?" There had been something very special, which Clarissa certainly would not tell. "What has he said to you? I don't think he would be simply cross to you."

"He has not been cross at all."

"What is it, then? Well;—if you won't tell me, I think that you are afraid of me. We never yet have been afraid of each other." Then there was a pause. "Clary, has he said that,—he loves you?" There was another pause. Clarissa thought it all over, and for a moment was not quite certain whether any such sweet assurance had or had not been given to her. Then she remembered his words;—"You know how dearly I love you." But ought they to be sweet to her now? Had he not so offended her that there could never be forgiveness? And if no forgiveness, how then could his love be sweet to her? Patience waited, and then repeated her question. "Tell me, Clary; what has he said to you?"

"I don't know."

"Do you love him, Clary?"

"No. I hate him."

"Hate him, Clary? You did not use to hate him. You did not hate him yesterday? You would not hate him without a cause. My darling, tell me what it means! If you and I do not trust each other what will the world be to us? There is no one else to

whom we can tell our troubles." Nevertheless Clarissa would not tell this trouble. "Why do you say that you hate him?"

"I don't know why. Oh, dear Patty, why do you go on so? Yes; he did say that he loved me;—there."

"And did that make you unhappy? It need not make you unhappy, though you should refuse him. When his brother asked you to marry him, that did not make you unhappy."

"Yes it did;—very."

"And is this the same?"

"No;—it is quite different."

"I am afraid, Clary, that Ralph Newton would not make a good husband. He is extravagant and in debt, and papa would not like it."

"Then papa should not let him come here just as he pleases and whenever he likes. It is papa's fault; —that is to say it would be if there were anything in it."

"Is there nothing in it, Clary? What answer did you make when he told you that he loved you?"

"You came, and I made no answer. I do wish that you had come before." She wanted to tell her sister everything but the one thing, but was unable to do so because the one thing affected the other things so vitally. As it was, Patience, finding that she could press her questions no further, was altogether in the dark. That Ralph had made a declaration of love to her sister she did know; but in what manner Clarissa had received it she could not guess. She had hitherto feared that Clary was too fond of the young man, but

Clary would now only say that she hated him. But the matter would soon be set at rest. Ralph Newton would now, no doubt, go to their father. If Sir Thomas would permit it, this new-fangled hatred of Clary's would, Patience thought, soon be overcome. If, however,—as was more probable,—Sir Thomas should violently disapprove, then there would be no more visits from Ralph Newton to the villa. As there had been a declaration of love, of course their father would be informed of it at once. Patience, having so resolved, allowed her sister to go to her bed without further questioning.

In Clarissa's own bosom the great offence had been forgiven,—or rather condoned before the morning. Her lover had been very cruel to her, very wicked, and most unkind;—especially in this, that he had turned to absolute pain a moment of life which might have been of all moments the fullest of joy; and especially cruel in this, that he had so treated her that she could not look forward to future joy without alloy. She could forgive him;—yes. But she could not endure that he should think that she would forgive him. She was willing to blot out the offence, as a thing by itself, in an island of her life,—of which no one should ever think again. Was she to lose her lover for ever because she did not forgive him! If they could only come to some agreement that the offence should be acknowledged to be heinous, unpardonable, but committed in temporary madness, and that henceforward it should be buried in oblivion! Such agreement, however, was impossible. There could be no speech about the matter. Was she or was she not to lose her lover for ever because he had done this wicked thing? Dur-

ing the night she made up her mind that she could not afford to pay such a price for the sake of avenging virtue. For the future she would be on her guard! Wicked and heartless man, who had robbed her of so much? And yet how charming he had been to her as he looked into her eyes, and told her that he could do very much better than fall in love with her West Indian cousin. Then she thought of the offence again. Ah, if only a time might come in which they should be engaged together as man and wife with the consent of everybody! Then there would be no more offences.

CHAPTER IV.

Mary Bonner.

WHILE Clarissa Underwood was being kissed on the lawn at Popham Villa, Sir Thomas was sitting, very disconsolate, in a private room at the Dolphin, in Southampton. It had required no great consideration to induce him to resolve that a home should be given by him to his niece. Though he was a man so weak that he could allow himself to shun from day to day his daily duty,—and to do this so constantly as to make up out of various omissions, small in themselves, a vast aggregate of misconduct,—still he was one who would certainly do what his conscience prompted him to be right in any great matter as to which the right and the wrong appeared to him to be clearly defined. Though he loved his daughters dearly, he could leave them from day to day almost without protection,—because each day's fault in so doing was of itself but small. This new niece of his he certainly did not

love at all. He had never seen her. He was almost morbidly fearful of new responsibilities. He expected nothing but trouble in thus annexing a new unknown member to his family. And yet he had decided upon doing it, because the duty to be done was great enough to be clearly marked—demanding an immediate resolve, and capable of no postponement. But, as he thought of it, sitting alone on the eve of the girl's coming, he was very uneasy. What was he to do with her if he found her to be one difficult to manage, self-willed, vexatious, or,—worse again,—ill-conditioned as to conduct, and hurtful to his own children? Should it even become imperative upon him to be rid of her, how should riddance be effected? And then what would she think of him and his habits of life?

And this brought him to other reflections. Might it not be possible utterly to break up that establishment of his in Southampton Buildings, so that he would be forced by the necessity of things to live at his home,—at some home which he would share with the girls? He knew himself well enough to be sure that while those chambers remained in his possession, as long as that bedroom and bed were at his command, he could not extricate himself from the dilemma. Day after day the temptation was too great for him. And he hated the villa. There was nothing there that he could do. He had no books at the villa; and,—so he averred,—there was something in the air of Fulham which prevented him from reading books when he brought them there. No! He must break altogether fresh ground, and set up a new establishment. One thing was clear; he could not now do this before Mary Bonner's arrival, and therefore there was nothing to

create any special urgency. He had hoped that his girls would marry, so that he might be left to live alone in his chambers,—waited upon by old Stemm,—without sin on his part; but he was beginning to discover that girls do not always get married out of the way in their first bloom. And now he was taking to himself another girl! He must, he knew, give over all hope of escape in that direction. He was very uneasy; and when quite late at night,—or rather, early in the morning,—he took himself to bed, his slumbers were not refreshing. The truth was that no air suited him for sleeping except the air of Southampton Buildings.

The packet from St. Thomas was to be in the harbour at eight o'clock the next morning,—telegrams from Cape Clear, The Lizard, Eddystone Lighthouse, and where not, having made all that as certain as sunrising. At eight o'clock he was down on the quay, and there was the travelling city of the Royal Atlantic Steam Mail Packet Company at that moment being warped into the harbour. The ship as he walked along the jetty was so near to him that he could plainly see the faces of the passengers on deck,—men and women, girls and children, all dressed up to meet their friends on shore, crowding the sides of the vessel in their eagerness to be among the first to get on shore. He anxiously scanned the faces of the ladies that he might guess which was to be the lady that was to be to him almost the same as a daughter. He saw not one as to whom he could say that he had a hope. Some there were in the crowd, some three or four, as to whom he acknowledged that he had a fear. At last he remembered that his girl would necessarily be in deep mourning. He saw two young women in black; but there

was nothing to prepossess him about either of them. One of them was insignificant and very plain. The other was fat and untidy. They neither of them looked like ladies. What if fate should have sent to him as a daughter,—as a companion for his girls,—that fat, untidy, ill-bred looking young woman? As it happened, the ill-bred looking young woman whom he feared, was a cook who had married a ship-steward, had gone out among the islands with her husband, had found that the speculation did not answer, and was now returning in the hope of earning her bread in her old vocation. Of this woman Sir Thomas Underwood was in great dread.

But at last he was on board, and whispered his question to the purser. Miss Bonner! Oh, yes; Miss Bonner was on board. Was he Sir Thomas Underwood, Miss Bonner's uncle? The purser evidently knew all about it, and there was something in his tone which seemed to assure Sir Thomas that the fat, untidy woman and his niece could not be one and the same person. The purser had just raised his cap to Sir Thomas, and had turned towards the cabin-stairs to go in search of the lady herself; but he was stopped immediately by Miss Bonner herself. The purser did his task very well,—said some slightest word to introduce the uncle and the niece together, and then vanished. Sir Thomas blushed, shuffled with his feet, and put out both his hands. He was shy, astonished, and frightened,—and did not know what to say. The girl came up to him, took his hand in hers, holding it for a moment, and then kissed it. "I did not think you would come yourself," she said.

"Of course I have come myself. My girls are at

home, and will receive you to-night." She said nothing further then, but again raised his hand and kissed it.

It is hardly too much to say that Sir Thomas Underwood was in a tremble as he gazed upon his niece. Had she been on the deck as he walked along the quay, and had he noted her, he would not have dared to think that such a girl as that was coming to his house. He declared to himself at once that she was the most lovely young woman he had ever seen. She was tall and somewhat large, with fair hair, of which now but very little could be seen, with dark eyes, and perfect eyebrows, and a face which, either for colour or lines of beauty, might have been taken as a model for any female saint or martyr. There was a perfection of symmetry about it,—and an assertion of intelligence combined with the loveliness which almost frightened her uncle. For there was something there, also, beyond intelligence and loveliness. We have heard of "an eye to threaten and command." Sir Thomas did not at this moment tell himself that Mary Bonner had such an eye, but he did involuntarily and unconsciously acknowledge to himself that over such a young lady as this whom he now saw before him, it would be very difficult for him to exercise parental control. He had heard that she was nineteen, but it certainly seemed to him that she was older than his own daughters. As to Clary, there could be no question between the two girls as to which of them would exercise authority over the other,—not by force of age, but by dint of character, will, and fitness. And this Mary Bonner, who now shone before him as a goddess almost, a young woman to whom no ordinary man would speak without that kind of trepidation which

goddesses do inflict on ordinary men, had proposed to herself,—to go out as a governess! Indeed, at this very moment such, probably, was her own idea. As yet she had received no reply to the letter she had written other than that which was now conveyed by her uncle's presence.

A few questions were asked as to the voyage. No;—she had not been at all ill. "I have almost feared," she said, "to reach England, thinking I should be so desolate." "We will not let you be desolate," said Sir Thomas, brightening up a little under the graciousness of the goddess's demeanour. "My girls are looking forward to your coming with the greatest delight." Then she asked some question as to her cousins, and Sir Thomas thought that there was majesty even in her voice. It was low, soft, and musical; but yet, even in that as in her eye, there was something that indicated a power of command.

He had no servant with him to assist in looking after her luggage. Old Stemm was the only man in his employment, and he could hardly have brought Stemm down to Southampton on such an errand. But he soon found that everybody about the ship was ready to wait upon Miss Bonner. Even the captain came to take a special farewell of her, and the second officer seemed to have nothing to do but to look after her. The doctor was at her elbow to the last; and all her boxes and trunks seemed to extricate themselves from the general mass with a readiness which is certainly not experienced by ordinary passengers. There are certain favours in life which are very charming,—but very unjust to others, and which we may perhaps lump under the name of priority of service. Money will

hardly buy it. When money does buy it, there is no injustice. When priority of service is had, like a coach-and-four, by the man who can afford to pay for it, industry, which is the source of wealth, receives its fitting reward. Rank will often procure it; most unjustly,—as we, who have no rank, feel sometimes with great soreness. Position other than that of rank, official position or commercial position, will secure it in certain cases. A railway train is stopped at a wrong place for a railway director, or a post-office manager gets his letters taken after time. These, too, are grievances. But priority of service is perhaps more readily accorded to feminine beauty, and especially to unprotected feminine beauty, than to any other form of claim. Whether or no this is ever felt as a grievance, ladies who are not beautiful may perhaps be able to say. There flits across our memory at the present moment some reminiscence of angry glances at the too speedy attendance given by custom-house officers to pretty women. But this priority of service is, we think, if not deserved, at least so natural, as to take it out of the catalogue of evils of which complaint should be made. One might complain with as much avail that men will fall in love with pretty girls instead of with those who are ugly! On the present occasion Sir Thomas was well contented. He was out of the ship, and through the Custom House, and at the railway station, and back at the inn before the struggling mass of passengers had found out whether their longed-for boxes had or had not come with them in the ship. And then Miss Bonner took it all,—not arrogantly, as though it were her due; but just as the grass takes rain or the flowers sunshine. These good things came

to her from heaven, and no doubt she was thankful. But they came to her so customarily, as does a man's dinner to him, or his bed, that she could not manifest surprise at what was done for her.

Sir Thomas hardly spoke to her except about her journey and her luggage till they were down together in the sitting-room at the inn. Then he communicated to her his proposal as to her future life. It was right, he thought, that she should know at once what he intended. Two hours ago, before he had seen her, he had thought of telling her simply where she was to live, and of saying that he would find a home for her. Now he found it expedient to place the matter in a different light. He would offer her the shelter of his roof as though she were a queen who might choose among her various palaces. "Mary," he said, "we hope that you will stay with us altogether."

"To live with you,—do you mean?"

"Certainly to live with us."

"I have no right to expect such an offer as that."

"But every right to accept it, my dear, when it is made. That is if it suits you."

"I had not dreamed of that. I thought that perhaps you would let me come to you for a few weeks, —till I should know what to do."

"You shall come and be one of us altogether, my dear, if you think that you will like it. My girls have no nearer relative than you. And we are not so barbarous as to turn our backs on a new-found cousin." She again kissed his hand, and then turned away from him and wept. "You feel it all strange now," he said, "but I hope we shall be able to make you comfortable."

"I have been so lonely," she sobbed out amidst her tears.

He had not dared to say a word to her about her father, whose death had taken place not yet three months since. Of his late brother-in-law he had known little or nothing, except that the General had been a man who always found it difficult to make both ends meet, and who had troubled him frequently, not exactly for loans, but in regard to money arrangements which had been disagreeable to him. Whether General Bonner had or had not been an affectionate father he had never heard. There are men who, in Sir Thomas's position, would have known all about such a niece after a few hours' acquaintance; but our lawyer was not such a man. Though the girl seemed to him to be everything that was charming, he did not dare to question her; and when they arrived at the station in London, no word had as yet been said about the General.

As they were having the luggage piled on the top of a cab, the fat cook passed along the platform. "I hope you are more comfortable now, Mrs. Woods," said Mary Bonner, with a smile as sweet as May, while she gave her hand to the woman.

"Thank'ee, Miss; I'm better; but it's only a moil of trouble, one thing as well t'other." Mrs. Woods was evidently very melancholy at the contemplation of her prospects.

"I hope you'll find yourself comfortable now." Then she whispered to Sir Thomas;—"She is a poor young woman whose husband has ill-used her, and she lost her only child, and has now come here to earn her bread. She isn't nice-looking, but she is so good!" Sir Thomas did not dare to tell Mary Bonner that he

had already noticed Mrs. Wood, and that he had conceived the idea that Mrs. Wood was the niece of whom he had come in search.

They made the journey at once to Fulham in the cab, and Sir Thomas found it to be very long. He was proud of his new niece, but he did not know what to say to her. And he felt that she, though he was sure that she was clever, gave him no encouragement to speak. It was all very well while, with her beautiful eyes full of tears, she had gone through the ceremony of kissing his hand in token of her respect and gratitude;—but that had been done often enough, and could not very well be repeated in the cab. So they sat silent, and he was rejoiced when he saw those offensive words, Popham Villa, on the posts of his gateway. "We have only a humble little house, my dear," he said, as they turned in. She looked at him and smiled. "I believe you West Indians generally are lodged very sumptuously."

"Papa had a large straggling place up in the hills, but it was anything but sumptuous. I do love the idea of an English home, where things are neat and nice. Oh, dear;—how lovely! That is the River Thames; —isn't it? How very beautiful!" Then the two girls were at the door of the cab, and the new-comer was enveloped in the embraces of her cousins.

Sir Thomas, as he walked along the banks of the river while the young ladies prepared each other for dinner, reflected that he had never in his life done such a day's work before as he had just accomplished. When he had married a wife, that indeed had been a great piece of business; but it had been done slowly; —for he had been engaged four years—and he had of

course been much younger at that period. Now he had brought into his family a new inmate who would force him in his old age to change all his habits of life. He did not think that he would dare to neglect Mary Bonner, and to stay in London while she lived at the villa. He was almost sorry that he had ever heard of Mary Bonner, in spite of her beauty, and although he had as yet been able to find in her no cause of complaint. She was ladylike and quiet;—but yet he was afraid of her. When she came down into the drawing-room with her hand clasped in that of Clarissa, he was still more afraid of her. She was dressed all in black, with the utmost simplicity,—with nothing on her by way of ornament beyond a few large black beads; but yet she seemed to him to be splendid. There was a grace of motion about her that was almost majestic. Clary was very pretty,—very pretty, indeed; but Clary was just the girl that an old gentleman likes to fetch him his slippers and give him his tea. Sir Thomas felt that, old as he was, it would certainly be his business to give Mary Bonner her tea.

The two girls contrived to say a few words to their father that night before they joined Mary amidst her trunks in her bedroom. "Papa, isn't she lovely?" said Clarissa.

"She certainly is a very handsome young woman."

"And not a bit like what I expected," continued Clary. "Of course I knew she was good-looking. I had always heard that. But I thought that she would have been a sort of West Indian girl, dark, and lazy, and selfish. Ralph was saying that is what they are out there."

"I don't suppose that Ralph knows anything about it," said Sir Thomas. "And what do you say of your new cousin, Patience?"

"I think I shall love her dearly. She is so gentle and sweet."

"But she is not at all what you expected?" demanded Clarissa.

"I hardly know what I expected," replied the prudent Patience. "But certainly I did not expect anything so lovely as she is. Of course, we can't know her yet; but as far as one can judge, I think I shall like her."

"But she is so magnificently beautiful!" said the energetic Clarissa.

"I think she is," said Sir Thomas. "And I quite admit that it is a kind of beauty to surprise one. It did surprise me. Had not one of you better go upstairs to her?" Then both the girls bounded off to assist their cousin in her chamber.

CHAPTER V.

Mr. Neefit and his Family.

Mr. Neefit was a breeches-maker in Conduit Street, of such repute that no hunting man could be said to go decently into the hunting-field unless decorated by a garment made in Mr. Neefit's establishment. His manipulation of leather was something marvellous; and in latter years he had added to his original art,—an art which had at first been perfect rather than comprehensive,—an exquisite skill in cords, buckskins, and such like materials. When his trade was becoming prosperous, he had thought of de-

generating into a tailor, adding largely to his premises, and of compensating his pride by the prospects of great increase to his fortune; but an angel of glory had whispered to him to let well alone, and he was still able to boast that all his measurements had been confined to the legs of sportsmen. Instead of extending his business, he had simply extended his price, and had boldly clapped on an extra half-guinea to every pair that he supplied. The experiment was altogether successful, and when it was heard by the riding men of the City that Mr. Neefit's prices were undoubtedly higher than those of any other breeches-maker in London, and that he had refused to supply breeches for the grooms of a Marquis because the Marquis was not a hunting man, the riding-men of the City flocked to him in such numbers, that it became quite a common thing for them to give their orders in June and July, so that they might not be disappointed when November came round. Mr. Neefit was a prosperous man, but he had his troubles. Now, it was a great trouble to him that some sporting men would be so very slow in paying for the breeches in which they took pride!

Mr. Neefit's fortune had not been rapid in early life. He had begun with a small capital and a small establishment, and even now his place of business was very limited in size. He had been clever enough to make profit even out of its smallness,—and had contrived that it should be understood that the little back room in which men were measured was so diminutive because it did not suit his special business to welcome a crowd. It was his pride, he said, to wait upon hunting men,—but with the garments of the world at

large he wished to have no concern whatever. In the outer shop, looking into Conduit Street, there was a long counter on which goods were unrolled for inspection; and on which an artist, the solemnity of whose brow and whose rigid silence betokened the nature of his great employment, was always cutting out leather. This grave man was a German, and there was a rumour among young sportsmen that old Neefit paid this highly-skilled operator £600 a year for his services! Nobody knew as he did how each morsel of leather would behave itself under the needle, or could come within two hairbreadths of him in accuracy across the kneepan. As for measuring, Mr. Neefit did that himself,—almost always. To be measured by Mr. Neefit was as essential to perfection as to be cut out for by the German. There were rumours, indeed, that from certain classes of customers Mr. Neefit and the great foreigner kept themselves personally aloof. It was believed that Mr. Neefit would not condescend to measure a retail tradesman. Latterly, indeed, there had arisen a doubt whether he would lay his august hand on a stockbroker's leg; though little Wallop, one of the young glories of Capel Court, swears that he is handled by him every year. "Confound 'is impudence," says Wallop; "I'd like to see him sending a foreman to me. And as for cutting, d' you think I don't know Bawwah's 'and!" The name of the foreign artist is not exactly known; but it is pronounced as we have written it, and spelt in that fashion by sporting gentlemen when writing to each other.

Our readers may be told in confidence that up to a very late date Mr. Neefit lived in the rooms over his shop. This is certainly not the thing for a prosperous

tradesman to do. Indeed, if a tradesman be known not to have a private residence, he will hardly become prosperous. But Neefit had been a cautious man, and till two years before the commencement of our story, he had actually lived in Conduit Street,—working hard, however, to keep his residence a deep secret from his customers at large. Now he was the proud possessor of a villa residence at Hendon, two miles out in the country beyond the Swiss Cottage; and all his customers knew that he was never to be found before 9.30 A.M., or after 5.15 P.M.

As we have said, Mr. Neefit had his troubles, and one of his great troubles was our young friend, Ralph Newton. Ralph Newton was a hunting man, with a stud of horses,—never less than four, and sometimes running up to seven and eight,—always standing at the Moonbeam, at Barnfield. All men know that Barnfield is in the middle of the B. B. Hunt,—the two initials standing for those two sporting counties, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire. Now, Mr. Neefit had a very large connexion in the B. B., and, though he never was on horseback in his life, subscribed twenty-five pounds a year to the pack. Mr. Ralph Newton had long favoured him with his custom; but, we are sorry to say, Mr. Ralph Newton had become a thorn in the flesh to many a tradesman in these days. It was not that he never paid. He did pay something; but as he ordered more than he paid, the sum-total against him was always an increasing figure. But then he was a most engaging, civil-spoken young man, whose order it was almost impossible to decline. It was known, moreover, that his prospects were so good! Nevertheless, it is not pleasant for a breeches-maker to

see the second hundred pound accumulating on his books for leather breeches for one gentleman. "What does he do with 'em?" old Neefit would say to himself; but he didn't dare to ask any such question of Mr. Newton. It isn't for a tradesman to complain that a gentleman consumes too many of his articles. Things, however, went so far that Mr. Neefit found it to be incumbent on him to make special inquiry about those prospects. Things had gone very far indeed,—for Ralph Newton appeared one summer evening at the villa at Hendon, and absolutely asked the breeches-maker to lend him a hundred pounds! Before he left he had taken tea with Mr. and Mrs. and Miss Neefit on the lawn, and had received almost a promise that the loan should be forthcoming if he would call in Conduit Street on the following morning. That had been early in May, and Ralph Newton had called, and, though there had been difficulties, he had received the money before three days had passed.

Mr. Neefit was a stout little man, with a bald head and somewhat protrusive eyes, whose manners to his customers contained a combination of dictatorial assurance and subservience, which he had found to be efficacious in his peculiar business. On general subjects he would rub his hands, and bow his head, and agree most humbly with every word that was uttered. In the same day he would be a Radical and a Conservative, devoted to the Church and a scoffer at parsons, animated on behalf of stag-hounds and a loud censurer of aught in the way of hunting other than the orthodox fox. On all trivial outside subjects he considered it to be his duty as a tradesman simply to ingratiate himself; but in a matter of breeches he gave

way to no man, let his custom be what it might. He knew his business, and was not going to be told by any man whether the garments which he made did or did not fit. It was the duty of a gentleman to come and allow him to see them on while still in a half-embryo condition. If gentlemen did their duty, he was sure that he could do his. He would take back anything that was not approved without a murmur;—but after that he must decline further transactions. It was, moreover, quite understood that to complain of his materials was so to insult him that he would condescend to make no civil reply. An elderly gentleman from Essex once told him that his buttons were given to breaking. "If you have your breeches,—washed,—by an old woman,—in the country,"—said Mr. Neefit, very slowly, looking into the elderly gentleman's face, "and then run through the mangle,—the buttons will break." The elderly gentleman never dared even to enter the shop again.

Mr. Neefit was perhaps somewhat over-imperious in matters relating to his own business; but, in excuse for him, it must be stated that he was, in truth, an honest tradesman;—he was honest at least so far, that he did make his breeches as well as he knew how. He had made up his mind that the best way to make his fortune was to send out good articles,—and he did his best. Whether or no he was honest in adding on that additional half guinea to the price because he found that the men with whom he dealt were fools enough to be attracted by a high price, shall be left to advanced moralists to decide. In that universal agreement with diverse opinions there must, we fear, have been something of dishonesty. But he made the

best of breeches, put no shoddy or cheap stitching into them, and was, upon the whole, an honest tradesman.

From 9.30 to 5.15 were Mr. Neefit's hours; but it had come to be understood by those who knew the establishment well, that from half-past twelve to half-past one the master was always absent. The young man who sat at the high desk, and seemed to spend all his time in contemplating the bad debts in the ledger, would tell gentlemen who called up to one that Mr. Neefit was in the City. After one it was always said that Mr. Neefit was lunching at the Restaurong. The truth was that Mr. Neefit always dined in the middle of the day at a public-house round the corner, having a chop and a "follow chop," a pint of beer, a penny newspaper and a pipe. When the villa at Hendon had been first taken, Mrs. Neefit had started late dinners; but that vigilant and intelligent lady had soon perceived that this simply meant, in regard to her husband, two dinners a day,—and apoplexy. She had, therefore, returned to the old ways,—an early dinner for herself and daughter, and a little bit of supper at night. Now, one day in June,—that very Saturday on which Sir Thomas Underwood brought his niece home to Fulham, the day after that wicked kiss on the lawn at Fulham, Ralph Newton walked into Neefit's shop during the hour of Mr. Neefit's absence, and ordered,—three pair of breeches. Herr "Bawwah," the cutter, who never left his board during the day for more than five minutes at a time, remained, as was his custom, mute and apparently inattentive; but the foreman came down from his perch and took the order. Mr. Neefit was out, unfortunately;—in the City. Ralph Newton

remarked that his measure was not in the least altered, gave his order, and went out.

"Three pair?—leather?" asked Mr. Neefit, when he returned, raising his eyebrows, and clearly showing that the moment was not one of unmixed delight.

"Two leather;—one cord," said the foreman.

"He had four pair last year," said Mr. Neefit, in a tone so piteous that it might almost have been thought that he was going to weep.

"One hundred and eighty-nine pounds, fourteen shillings, and nine pence was the Christmas figure," said the foreman, turning back to a leaf in the book, which he found without any difficulty. Mr. Neefit took himself to the examination of certain completed articles which adorned his shop, as though he were anxious to banish from his mind so painful a subject. "Is he to 'ave 'em, Mr. Neefit?" asked the foreman. The master was still silent, and still fingered the materials which his very soul loved. "He must 'ave a matter of twenty pair by him,—unless he sells 'em," said the suspicious foreman.

"He don't sell 'em" said Mr. Neefit. "He ain't one of that sort. You can put 'em in hand, Waddle."

"Very well, Mr. Neefit. I only thought I'd mention it. It looked queer like, his coming just when you was out."

"I don't see anything queer in it. He ain't one of that sort. Do you go on." Mr. Waddle knew nothing of the hundred pounds, nor did he know that Ralph Newton had,—twice drank tea at Hendon. On both occasions Mrs. Neefit had declared that if ever she saw a gentleman, Mr. Newton was a gentleman; and Miss Neefit, though her words had been very few,

had evidently approved of Mr. Newton's manners. Now Miss Neefit was a beauty and an heiress.

Mr. Waddle had hardly been silenced, and had just retired with melancholy diligence amidst the records of unsatisfactory commercial transactions before Ralph Newton again entered the shop. He shook hands with Mr. Neefit,—as was the practice with many favourite customers,—and immediately went to work in regard to his new order, as though every Christmas and every Midsummer saw an account closed on his behalf in Mr. Neefit's books. "I did say just now, when I found you were out, that last year's lines would do; but it may be, you know, that I'm running a little to flesh."

"We can't be too particular, Mr. Newton," said the master.

"It's all for your sake that I come," said the young sportsman, walking into the little room, while Mr. Neefit followed with his scraps of paper and tapes, and Waddle followed him to write down the figures. "I don't care much how they look myself."

"Oh, Mr. Newton!"

"I shouldn't like 'em to wrinkle inside the knee, you know."

"That isn't likely with us, I hope, Mr. Newton."

"And I own I do like to be able to get into them."

"We don't give much trouble in that way, Mr. Newton."

"But the fact is I have such trust in you and the silent gentleman out there, that I believe you would fit me for the next twenty years, though you were never to see me."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Newton,—2, 4, and ⅛th, Waddle. I think Mr. Newton is a little stouter. But, perhaps, you may work that off before November, Mr. Newton. Thank you, Mr. Newton;—I think that'll do. You'll find we shan't be far wrong. Three pair, Mr. Newton?"

"Yes;—I think three pair will see me through next season. I don't suppose I shall hunt above four days, and I have some by me."

Some by him! There must be drawers full of them, —presses full of them, chests full of them! Waddle, the melancholy and suspicious Waddle, was sure that their customer was playing them false,—raising money on the garments as soon as they were sent to him; but he did not dare to say anything of this after the snubbing which he had already received. If old Neefit chose to be done by a dishonest young man it was nothing to him. But in truth Waddle did not understand men as well as did his master;—and then he knew nothing of his master's ambitious hopes.

"The bishops came out very strong last night;—didn't they?" said Ralph, in the outer shop.

"Very strong, indeed, Mr. Newton;—very strong."

"But, after all, they're nothing but a pack of old women."

"That's about what they are, Mr. Newton."

"Not but what we must have a Church, I suppose."

"We should do very badly without a Church, Mr. Newton. At least that is my opinion." Then Ralph left the shop, and the breeches-maker bowed him out of the door.

"Fifty thousand pounds!" said Ralph Newton to himself, as he walked into Bond Street and down to his club. When a man is really rich rumour always increases his money,—and rumour had doubled the fortune which Mr. Neefit had already amassed. "That means two thousand a year; and the girl herself is so pretty, that upon my honour I don't know which is the prettier,—she or Clary. But fancy old Neefit for one's father-in-law! Everybody is doing it now; but I don't think I'd do it for ten times the money. The fact is, one has got to get used to these things, and I am not used to it yet. I soon shall be,—or to something worse." Such was the nature of Ralph's thoughts as he walked away from Mr. Neefit's house to his club.

Mr. Neefit, as he went home, had his speculations also. In making breeches he was perfect, and in putting together money he had proved himself to be an adept. But as to the use of his money, he was quite as much at a loss as he would have been had he tried to wear the garments for which he measured his customers so successfully. He had almost realized the truth that from that money he himself could extract, for himself, but little delight beyond that which arose simply from the possession. Holidays destroyed him. Even a day at home at Hendon, other than Sunday, was almost more than he could endure. The fruition of life to him was in the completing of breeches, and its charm in a mutton-chop and a pipe of tobacco. He had tried idleness, and was wise enough to know almost at the first trial that idleness would not suit him. He had made one mistake in life which was irreparable. He had migrated from Conduit Street to

a cold, comfortless box of a house at a place in which, in order that his respectability might be maintained, he was not allowed to show his face in a public-house. This was very bad, but he would not make bad worse by giving up so much of Conduit Street as was still left to him. He would stick to the shop. But what would he do with his money? He had but one daughter. Thinking of this, day after day, month after month, year after year, he came slowly to the conclusion that it was his duty to make his daughter a lady. He must find some gentleman who would marry her, and then would give that gentleman all his money,—knowing as he did so that the gentleman would probably never speak to him again. And to this conclusion he came with no bitterness of feeling, with no sense of disappointment that to such an end must come the exertions of his laborious and successful life. There was nothing else for him to do. He could not be a gentleman himself. It seemed to be no more within his reach than it is for the gentleman to be an angel. He did not desire it. He would not have enjoyed it. He had that sort of sense which makes a man know so thoroughly his own limits that he has no regret at not passing them. But yet in his eyes a gentleman was so grand a thing,—a being so infinitely superior to himself,—that, loving his daughter above anything else, he did think he could die happy if he could see her married into a station so exalted. There was a humility in this as regarded himself and an affection for his child which was admirable.

The reader will think that he might at any rate have done better than to pitch upon such a one as Ralph Newton; but then the reader hardly knows

Ralph Newton as yet, and cannot at all realise the difficulty which poor Mr. Neefit experienced in coming across any gentleman in such a fashion as to be able to commence his operations. It is hardly open to a tradesman to ask a young man home to his house when measuring him from the hip to the knee. Neefit had heard of many cases in which gentlemen of money had married the daughters of commercial men, and he knew that the thing was to be done. Money, which spent in other directions seemed to be nearly useless to him, might be used beneficially in this way. But how was he to set about it? Polly Neefit was as pretty a girl as you shall wish to see, and he knew that she was pretty. But, if he didn't take care, the good-looking young gasfitter, next door to him down at Hendon, would have his Polly before he knew where he was. Or, worse still, as he thought, there was that mad son of his old friend Moggs, the boot-maker, Ontario Moggs as he had been christened by a Canadian godfather, with whom Polly had condescended already to hold something of a flirtation. He could not advertise for a genteel lover. What could he do?

Then Ralph Newton made his way down to the Hendon villa,—asking for money. What should have induced Mr. Newton to come to him for money he could not guess; but he did know that, of all the young men who came into his back shop to be measured, there was no one whose looks and manners and cheery voice had created so strong a feeling of pleasantness as had those of Mr. Ralph Newton. Mr. Neefit could not analyse it, but there was a kind of sunshine about the young man which would have made him very un-

willing to press hard for payment, or to stop the supply of breeches. He had taken a liking to Ralph, and found himself thinking about the young man in his journeys between Hendon and Conduit Street. Was not this the sort of gentleman that would suit his daughter? Neefit wanted no one to tell him that Ralph Newton was a gentleman,—what he meant by a gentleman, and that Wallop the stockbroker was not. Wallop the stockbroker spoke of himself as though he was a very fine fellow indeed; but to the thinking of Mr. Neefit, Ontario Moggs was more like a gentleman than Mr. Wallop. He had feared much as to his daughter, both in reference to the handsome gasfitter and to Ontario Moggs, but since that second tea-drinking he had hoped that his daughter's eyes were opened.

He had made inquiry about Ralph Newton, and had found that the young man was undoubtedly heir to a handsome estate in Hampshire,—a place called Newton Priory, with a parish of Newton Peele, and lodges, and a gamekeeper, and a park. He knew from of old that Ralph's uncle would have nothing to do with his nephew's debts; but he learned now as a certainty that the uncle could not disinherit his nephew. And the debts did not seem to be very high;—and Ralph had come into some property from his father. Upon the whole, though of course there must be a sacrifice of money at first, Neefit thought that he saw his way. Mr. Newton, too, had been very civil to his girl,—not simply making to her foolish flattering little speeches, but treating her—so thought Neefit—exactly as a high-bred gentleman would treat the lady of his thoughts. It was a high ambition; but Neefit thought that there might possibly be a way to success.

Mrs. Neefit had been a good helpmate to her husband,—having worked hard for him when hard work on her part was needed,—but was not altogether so happy in her disposition as her lord. He desired to shine only in his daughter,—and as a tradesman. She was troubled by the more difficult ambition of desiring to shine in her own person. It was she who had insisted on migrating to Hendon, and who had demanded also the establishment of a one-horse carriage. The one-horse carriage was no delight to Neefit, and hardly gave satisfaction to his wife after the first three months. To be driven along the same roads, day after day, at the rate of six miles an hour, though it may afford fresh air, is not an exciting amusement. Mrs. Neefit was not given to reading, and was debarred by a sense of propriety from making those beef-steak puddings for which, within her own small household, she had once been so famous. Hendon she found dull; and, though Hendon had been her own choice, she could not keep herself from complaining of its dulness to her husband. But she always told him that the fault lay with him. He ought to content himself with going to town four times a week, and take a six weeks' holiday in the autumn. That was the recognized mode of life with gentlemen who had made their fortunes in trade. Then she tried to make him believe that constant seclusion in Conduit Street was bad for his liver. But above all things he ought to give up measuring his own customers with his own hands. None of their genteel neighbours would call upon his wife and daughter as long as he did that. But Mr. Neefit was a man within whose bosom gallantry had its limits. He had given his wife a house at Hendon,

and was contented to take that odious journey backwards and forwards six days a week to oblige her. But when she told him not to measure his own customers, "he cut up rough," as Polly called it. "You be blowed," he said to the wife of his bosom. He had said it before, and she bore it with majestic equanimity.

Polly Neefit was, as we have said, as pretty a girl as you shall wish to see, in spite of a nose that was almost a pug nose, and a mouth that was a little large. I think, however, that she was perhaps prettier at seventeen, when she would run up and down Conduit Street on messages for her father,—who was not as yet aware that she had ceased to be a child,—than she became afterwards at Hendon, when she was twenty. In those early days her glossy black hair hung down her face in curls. Now, she had a thing on the back of her head, and her hair was manœuvred after the usual fashion. But her laughing dark eyes were full of good-humour, and looked as though they could be filled also with feeling. Her complexion was perfect,—perfect at twenty, though from its nature it would be apt to be fixed, and perhaps rough and coarse at thirty. But at twenty it was perfect. It was as is the colour of a half-blown rose, in which the variations from white to pink, and almost to red, are so gradual and soft as to have no limits. And then with her there was a charm beyond that of the rose, for the hues would ever be changing. As she spoke or laughed, or became serious, or sat thoughtless, or pored over her novel, the tint of her cheek and neck would change, as this or that emotion, be it ever so slight, played upon the current of her blood. She was

tall, and well made,—perhaps almost robust. She was good-humoured, somewhat given to frank coquetry, and certainly fond of young men. She had sense enough not to despise her father, and was good enough to endeavour to make life bearable to her mother. She was clever, too, in her way, and could say sprightly things. She read novels, and loved a love story. She meant herself to have a grand passion some day, but did not quite sympathise with her father's views about gentlemen. Not that these views were discussed between them, but each was gradually learning the mind of the other. It was very pleasant to Polly Neefit to waltz with the good-looking gasfitter;—and indeed to waltz with any man was a pleasure to Polly, for dancing was her Paradise upon earth. And she liked talking to Ontario Moggs, who was a clever man and had a great deal to say about many things. She believed that Ontario Moggs was dying for her love, but she had by no means made up her mind that Ontario was to be the hero of the great passion. The great passion was quite a necessity for her. She must have her romance. But Polly was aware that a great passion ought to be made to lead to a snug house, half a dozen children, and a proper, church-going, roast-mutton, duty-doing manner of life. Now Ontario Moggs had very wild ideas. As for the gasfitter, he danced well and was good-looking, but he had very little to say for himself. When Polly saw Ralph Newton,—especially when he sat out on the lawn with them and smoked cigars on his second coming,—she thought him very nice. She had no idea of being patronised by anyone, and she was afraid of persons whom she called "stuck-up" ladies and gentlemen.

But Mr. Newton had not patronised her, and she had acknowledged that he was—very nice. Such as she was, she was the idol of her father's heart and the apple of his eye. If she had asked him to give up measuring, he might have yielded. But then his Polly was too wise for that.

We must say a word more of Mrs. Neefit, and then we shall hope that our readers will know the family. She had been the daughter of a breeches-maker, to whom Neefit had originally been apprenticed,—and therefore regarded herself as the maker of the family. But in truth the business, such as it was now in its glory, had been constructed by her husband, and her own fortune had been very small. She was a stout, round-faced, healthy, meaningless woman, in whom ill-humour would not have developed itself unless idleness,—that root of all evil,—had fallen in her way. As it was, in the present condition of their lives, she did inflict much discomfort on poor Mr. Neefit. Had he been ill, she would have nursed him with all her care. Had he died, she would have mourned for him as the best of husbands. Had he been three parts ruined in trade, she would have gone back to Conduit Street and made beef-steak puddings almost without a murmur. She was very anxious for his Sunday dinner, and would have considered it to be a sin to be without a bit of something nice for his supper. She took care that he always wore flannel, and would never let him stay away from church, lest worse should befall him. But she couldn't let him be quiet. What else was there left for her to do but to nag him? Polly, who was with her during the long hours of the day, would not be nagged. "Now, mamma!" she'd say with a

tone of authority that almost overcame mamma. And if mamma was very cross, Polly would escape. But during the long hours of the night the breeches-maker could not escape;—and in minor matters the authority lay with her. It was only when great matters were touched that Mr. Neefit would rise in his wrath and desire his wife "to be blowed."

No doubt Mrs. Neefit was an unhappy woman,—more unfortunate as a woman than was her husband as a man. The villa at Hendon had been heavy upon him, but it had been doubly heavy upon her. He could employ himself. The legs of his customers, to him, were a blessed resource. But she had no resource. The indefinite idea which she had formed of what life would be in a pretty villa residence had been proved to be utterly fallacious,—though she had never acknowledged the fallacy either to husband or daughter. That one-horse carriage in which she was dragged about, was almost as odious to her as her own drawing-room. That had become so horrible that it was rarely used;—but even the dining-room was very bad. What would she do there, poor woman? What was there left for her to do at all in this world,—except to nag at her husband?

Nevertheless all who knew anything about the Neefits said that they were very respectable people, and had done very well in the world.

CHAPTER VI.

Mrs. Neefit's little Dinner.

On the Sunday morning following that remarkable Saturday on which Miss Bonner had been taken to her new home and Ralph Newton had ordered three pair of breeches, Mr. Neefit made a very ambitious proposition. "My dear, I think I'll ask that young man to come and have a bit of dinner here next Sunday." This was said after breakfast, as Mr. Neefit was being made smart in his church-going coat and his Sunday hat, which were kept together in Mrs. Neefit's big press.

"Which young man?" Now Mrs. Neefit when she asked the question knew very well that Mr. Newton was the young man to whom hospitality was to be offered. Ontario Moggs was her favourite; but Mr. Neefit would not have dreamed of asking Ontario Moggs to dinner.

"Mr. Newton, my dear," said Mr. Neefit, with his head stuck sharply up, while his wife tied a bow in his Sunday neckhandkerchief.

"Why should us ask him? He won't think nothing of his vittels when he gets 'em. He'd only turn up his nose; and as for Polly, what's the use of making her more saucy than she is? I don't want such as him here, Neefit;—that I don't. Stuck-up young men like him had better stay away from Alexandrina Cottage," —that was the name of the happy home at Hendon. "I'm sure our Polly won't be the better for having the likes of him here."

Nothing more was said on the subject till after the

return of the family from church; but during the sermon Mr. Neefit had had an opportunity of thinking the subject over, and had resolved that this was a matter in which it behoved him to be master. How was this marriage to be brought about if the young people were not allowed to see each other? Of course he might fail. He knew that. Very probably Mr. Newton might not accept the invitation,—might never show himself again at Alexandrina Cottage; but unless an effort was made there could not be success. "I don't see why he shouldn't eat a bit of dinner here," said Mr. Neefit, as soon as his pipe was lighted after their early dinner. "It ain't anything out of the way, as I know of."

"You're thinking of Polly, Neefit?"

"Why shouldn't I be thinking of her? There ain't no more of 'em. What's the use of working for her, if one don't think of her?"

"It won't do no good, Neefit. If we had things here as we might have 'em, indeed——!"

"What's amiss?"

"With nothing to drink out of, only common wine-glasses; and it's my belief Jemima 'd never cook a dinner as he'd look at. I know what they are,—them sort of young men. They're worse than a dozen ladies when you come to vittels."

Nevertheless Mr. Neefit resolved upon having his own way, and it was settled that Ralph Newton should be asked to come and eat a bit of dinner on next Sunday. Then there arose a difficulty as to the mode of asking him. Neefit himself felt that it would be altogether out of his line to indite an invitation. In days gone by, before he kept a clerk for the purpose,

he had written very many letters to gentlemen, using various strains of pressure as he called their attention to the little outstanding accounts which stood on his books and were thorns in his flesh. But of the writing of such letters as this now intended to be written he had no experience. As for Mrs. Neefit, her skill in this respect was less even than that of her husband. She could write, no doubt. On very rare occasions she would make some expression of her thoughts with pen and ink to Polly, when she and Polly were apart. But no one else ever saw how slight was her proficiency in this direction. But Polly was always writing. Polly's pothooks, as her father called them, were pictures in her father's eyes. She could dash off straight lines of writing,—line after line,—with sharp-pointed angles and long-tailed letters, in a manner which made her father proud of the money which he had spent on her education. So Polly was told to write the letter, and after many expressions of surprise, Polly wrote the letter that evening. "Mr. and Mrs. Neefit's compliments to Mr. Newton, and hope he will do them the honour to dine with them on Sunday next at five o'clock. Alexandrina Cottage, Sunday."

"Say five sharp," said the breeches-maker.

"No, father, I won't,—say anything about sharp."

"Why not, Polly?"

"It wouldn't look pretty. I don't suppose he'll come, and I'm sure I don't know why you should ask him. Dear me, I'm certain he'll know that I wrote it. What will he think?"

"He'll think it comes from as pretty a young woman as he ever clapped his eyes on," said Mr. Neefit,

who was not at all reticent in the matter of compliments to his daughter.

"Laws, Neefit, how you do spoil the girl!" said his wife.

"He has about finished spoiling me now, mamma; so it don't much signify. You always did spoil me; —didn't you, father?" Then Polly kissed Mr. Neefit's bald head; and Mr. Neefit, as he sat in the centre of his lawn, with his girdle loose around him, a glass of gin and water by his side, and a pipe in his mouth, felt that in truth there was something left in the world worth living for. But a thought came across his mind, —"If that chap comes I shan't be as comfortable next Sunday." And then there was another thought,—"If he takes my Polly away from me, I dont know as I shall ever be comfortable again." But still he did not hesitate or repent. Of course his Polly must have a husband.

Then a dreadful proposition was made by Mrs. Neefit. "Why not have Moggs too?"

"Oh, mamma!"

"Are you going to turn your nose up at Ontario Moggs, Miss Pride?"

"I don't turn my nose up at him. I'm very fond of Mr. Moggs. I think he's the best fun going. But I am sure that if Mr. Newton does come, he'd rather not have Mr. Moggs here too."

"It wouldn't do at all," said Mr. Neefit. "Ontario is all very well, but Mr. Newton and he wouldn't suit."

Mrs. Neefit was snubbed, and went to sleep on the sofa for the rest of the afternoon,—intending, no

doubt, to let Mr. Neefit have the benefit of her feelings as soon as they two should be alone together.

Our friend Ralph received the note, and accepted the invitation. He told himself that it was a lark. As the reader knows, he had already decided that he would not sell himself even to so pretty a girl as Polly Neefit for any amount of money; but not the less might it be agreeable to him to pass a Sunday afternoon in her company.

Ralph Newton at this time occupied very comfortable bachelor's rooms in a small street close to St. James's Palace. He had now held these for the last two years, and had contrived to make his friends about town know that here was his home. He had declined to go into the army himself when he was quite young, —or rather had agreed not to go into the army, on condition that he should not be pressed as to any other profession. He lived, however, very much with military friends, many of whom found it convenient occasionally to breakfast with him, or to smoke a pipe in his chambers. He never did any work, and lived a useless, butterfly life,—only with this difference from other butterflies, that he was expected to pay for his wings.

In that matter of payment was the great difficulty of Ralph Newton's life. He had been started at nineteen with an allowance of £ 250 per annum. When he was twenty-one he inherited a fortune from his father of more than double that amount; and as he was the undoubted heir to a property of £ 7,000 a year, it may be said of him that he was born with a golden spoon. But he had got into debt before he was twenty, and had never got out of it. The quarrel

with his uncle was an old affair, arranged for him by his father before he knew how to quarrel on his own score, and therefore we need say no more about that at present. But his uncle would not pay a shilling for him, and would have quarrelled also with his other nephew, the clergyman, had he known that the younger brother assisted the elder. But up to the moment of which we are writing, the iron of debt had not as yet absolutely entered into the soul of this young man. He had, in his need, just borrowed £100 from his breeches-maker; and this, perhaps, was not the first time that he had gone to a tradesman for assistance. But hitherto money had been forthcoming, creditors had been indulgent, and at this moment he possessed four horses which were eating their heads off at the Moonbeam, at Barnfield.

At five o'clock, with sufficient sharpness, Ralph Newton got out of a Hansom cab at the door of Alexandrina Cottage. "He's cum in a 'Ansom," said Mrs. Neefit, looking over the blind of the drawing-room window. "That's three-and-six," said Neefit, with a sigh. "You didn't think he was going to walk, father?" said Polly. "There's the Underground within two miles, if the Midland didn't suit," said Mr. Neefit. "Nonsense, father. Of course he'd come in a cab!" said Polly. Mrs. Neefit was not able to add the stinging remark with which her tongue was laden, as Ralph Newton was already in the house. She smoothed her apron, crossed her hands, and uttered a deep sigh. There could be no more going down into the kitchen now to see whether the salmon was boiled, or to provide for the proper dishing of the lamb. "This is quite condescending of you, Mr. Newton," said the

breeches-maker, hardly daring to shake hands with his guest,—though in his shop he was always free enough with his customers in this matter. Polly looked as though she thought there was no condescension whatever, held up her head, and laughed and joked, and asked some questions about the German at the shop, whom she declared she was never allowed to see now, and whose voice she swore she had never heard. "Is he dumb, Mr. Newton? Father never will tell me anything about him. You must know."

"Laws, Polly, what does it matter?" said Mrs. Neefit. And they were the only words she had spoken. Polly, from the first, had resolved that she would own to the shop. If Mr. Newton came to see her, he should come to see a girl who was not ashamed to speak of herself as the daughter of a breeches-maker.

"He don't talk much, does he, Mr. Newton?" said Mr. Neefit, laughing merrily.

"Do tell me one thing," said Ralph. "I know it's a secret, but I'll promise not to tell it. What is his real name?"

"This isn't fair," said Mr. Neefit, greatly delighted. "All trades have their secrets. Come, come, Mr. Newton!"

"I know his name," said Polly.

"Do tell me," said Ralph, coming close to her, as though he might hear it in a whisper.

"Mr. Neefit, I wish you wouldn't talk about such things here," said the offended matron. "But now here's dinner." She was going to take her guest's arm, but Mr. Neefit arranged it otherwise.

"The old uns and the young uns;—that's the way to pair them," said Mr. Neefit,—understanding nature

better than he did precedence; and so they walked into the next room. Mrs. Neefit was not quite sure whether her husband had or had not done something improper. She had her doubts, and they made her uncomfortable.

The dinner went off very well. Neefit told how he had gone himself to the fishmonger's for that bit of salmon, how troubled his wife had been in mind about the lamb, and how Polly had made the salad. "And I'll tell you what I did, Mr. Newton; I brought down that bottle of champagne in my pocket myself;—gave six bob for it at Palmer's, in Bond Street. My wife says we ain't got glasses fit to drink it out of."

"You needn't tell Mr. Newton all that."

"Mr. Newton, what I am I ain't ashamed on, nor yet what I does. Let me have the honour of drinking a glass of wine with you, Mr. Newton. You see us just as we are. I wish it was better, but it couldn't be welcomer. Your health, Mr. Newton."

There are many men,—and men, too, not of a bad sort,—who in such circumstances cannot make themselves pleasant. Grant the circumstances, with all the desire to make the best of them,—and these men cannot be otherwise than stiff, disagreeable, and uneasy. But then, again, there are men who in almost any position can carry themselves as though they were to the manner born. Ralph Newton was one of the latter. He was not accustomed to dine with the tradesmen who supplied him with goods, and had probably never before encountered such a host as Mr. Neefit; but he went through the dinner with perfect ease and satisfaction, and before the pies and jellies had been consumed, had won the heart of even Mrs.

Neefit. "Laws, Mr. Newton," she said, "what can you know about custards?" Then Ralph Newton offered to come and make custards against her in her own kitchen,—providing he might have Polly to help him. "But you'd want the back kitchen to yourselves, I'm thinking" said Mr. Neefit, in high good-humour.

Mr. Neefit certainly was not a delicate man. As soon as dinner was over, and the two ladies had eaten their strawberries and cream, he suggested that the port wine should be taken out into the garden. In the farther corner of Mr. Neefit's grounds, at a distance of about twenty yards from the house, was a little recess called "the arbour," admonitory of earwigs, and without much pretension to comfort. It might hold three persons, but on this occasion Mr. Neefit was minded that two only should enjoy the retreat. Polly carried out the decanter and glasses, but did not presume to stay there for a moment. She followed her mother into the gorgeous drawing-room, where Mrs. Neefit at once went to sleep, while her daughter consoled herself with a novel. Mr. Neefit, as we have said, was not a delicate man. "That girl 'll have twenty thousand pound, down on the nail, the day she marries the man as I approves of. Fill your glass, Mr. Newton. She will;—and there's no mistake about it. There'll be more money too, when I'm dead,—and the old woman."

It might be owned that such a speech from the father of a marriageable daughter to a young man who had hardly as yet shown himself to be enamoured, was not delicate. But it may be a question whether it was not sensible. He had made up his mind, and therefore went at once at his object. And unless he

did the business in this way, what chance was there that it would be done at all? Mr. Newton could not come down to Alexandrina Cottage every other day, or meet the girl elsewhere, as he might do young ladies of fashion. And, moreover, the father knew well enough that were his girl once to tell him that she had set her heart upon the gasfitter, or upon Ontario Moggs, he would not have the power to contradict her. He desired that she should become a gentleman's wife; and thinking that this was the readiest way to accomplish his wish, he saw no reason why he should not follow it. When he had spoken, he chucked off his glass of wine, and looked into his young friend's face for an answer.

"He'll be a lucky fellow that gets her," said Ralph, beginning unconsciously to feel that it might perhaps have been as well for him had he remained in his lodgings on this Sunday.

"He will be a lucky fellow, Mr. Newton. She's as good as gold. And a well bred 'un too, though I say it as shouldn't. There's not a dirty drop in her. And she's that clever, she can do a'most anything. As for her looks, I'll say nothing about them. You've got eyes in your head. There ain't no mistake there, Mr. Newton; no paint; no Madame Rachel; no made beautiful for ever! It's human nature what you see there, Mr. Newton."

"I'm quite sure of that."

"And she has the heart of an angel." By this time Mr. Neefit was alternately wiping the tears from his eyes, and taking half glasses of port wine. "I know all about you, Mr. Newton. You are a gentleman;—that's what you are."

"I hope so."

"And if you don't get the wrong side of the post, you'll come out right at last. You'll have a nice property some of these days, but you're just a little short of cash at present."

"That's about true, Mr. Neefit."

"I want nobody to tell me;—I know," continued Neefit. "Now if you make up to her, there she is,—with twenty thousand pounds down. You are a gentleman, and I want that girl to be a lady. You can make her a lady. You can't make her no better than she is. The best man in England can't do that. But you can make her a lady. I don't know what she'll say, mind; but you can ask her,—if you please. I like you, and you can ask her,—if you please. What answer she'll make, that's her look out. But you can ask her,—if you please. Perhaps I'm a little too forrard; but I call that honest. I don't know what you call it. But this I do know;—there ain't so sweet a girl as that within twenty miles round London." Then Mr. Neefit, in his energy, dashed his hand down among the glasses on the little rustic table in the arbour.

The reader may imagine that Ralph Newton was hardly ready with his answer. There are men, no doubt, who in such an emergency would have been able to damn the breeches-maker's impudence, and to have walked at once out of the house. But our young friend felt no inclination to punish his host in such fashion as this. He simply remarked that he would think of it, the matter being too grave for immediate decision, and that he would join the ladies.

"Do, Mr. Newton," said Mr. Neefit, "go and join

Polly. You'll find she's all I tell you. I'll sit here and have a pipe."

Ralph did join the ladies; and, finding Mrs. Neefit asleep, he induced Polly to take a walk with him amidst the lanes of Hendon. When he left Alexandrina Cottage in the evening, Mr. Neefit whispered a word into his ear at the gate. "You know my mind. Strike while the iron's hot. There she is,—just what you see her."

CHAPTER VII.

You are one of us now.

THE first week after Mary Bonner's arrival at Popham Villa went by without much to make it remarkable, except the strangeness arising from the coming of a stranger. Sir Thomas did stay at home on that Sunday, but when the time came for going to morning church, shuffled out of that disagreeable duty in a manner that was satisfactory neither to himself nor his daughters. "Oh, papa; I thought you would have gone with us!" said Patience at the last moment.

"I think not to-day, my dear," he said, with that sort of smile which betokens inward uneasiness. Patience reproached him with a look, and then the three girls went off together. Even Patience herself had offered to excuse Mary, on the score of fatigue, sea-sickness, and the like; but Mary altogether declined to be excused. She was neither fatigued, she said, nor sick; and of course she would go to church. Sir Thomas stayed at home, and thought about himself. How could he go to church when he knew that he could

neither listen to the sermon nor join in the prayers? "I suppose people do," he said to himself; "but I can't. I'd go to church all day long, if I found that it would serve me."

He went up to London on the Monday, and returned to the villa to dinner. He did the same on the Tuesday. On the Wednesday he remained in London. On the Thursday he came home, but dined in town. After that he found himself to be on sufficiently familiar terms with his niece to fall back into his old habits of life.

Patience was very slow in speaking to their cousin of her father's peculiarities; but Clarissa soon told the tale. "You'll get to know papa soon," she said.

"He has been so kind to me."

"He is very good; but you must know, dear, that we are the most deserted and disconsolate ladies that ever lived out of a poem. Papa has been home now four days together; but that is for your beaux yeux. We are here for weeks together without seeing him;—very often for more than a week."

"Where does he go?"

"He has a place in London;—such a place! you shall go and see it some day, though he won't thank us a bit for taking you there. He has the queerest old man to wait upon him, and he never sees anybody from day to day."

"But what does he do?"

"He is writing a book. That is the great secret. He never speaks about it, and does not like to be asked questions. But the truth is, he is the most

solitude-loving person in the world. He does find its charms, though Alexander Selkirk never could."

"And does nobody come here to you?"

"In the way of taking care of us? Nobody! We have to take care of ourselves. Of course it is dull. People do come and see us sometimes. Miss Spooner, for instance."

"Why should you laugh at poor Miss Spooner?" asked Patience.

"I don't laugh at her. We have other friends, you know; but not enough to make the house pleasant to you." After that, when Patience was not with them, she told something of Ralph Newton and his visits, though she said nothing to her cousin of her own cherished hopes. "I wonder what you'll think of Ralph Newton?" she said. Ralph Newton's name had been mentioned before in Mary's hearing more than once.

"Why should I think anything particular of Ralph Newton?"

"You'll have to think something particular about him as he is a sort of child of the house. Papa was his guardian, and he comes here just when he pleases."

"Who is he, and what is he, and where is he, and why is he?"

"He's a gentleman at large who does nothing. That's who he is."

"He thinks ever so much of himself, then?"

"No;—he doesn't. And he is nephew to an old squire down in Hampshire, who won't give him a penny. He oughtn't to want it, however, because when he came of age he had ever so much money of his

own. But he does want it,—sometimes. He must have the property when his uncle dies."

"Dear me;—how interesting!"

"As for the where he is, and why he is,—he comes here just when it suits him, and because we were almost brought up together. He doesn't dine here, and all that kind of thing, because papa is never at home. Nobody ever does dine here."

Then there was a short pause. "This Mr. Newton isn't a lover, then?" asked Miss Bonner.

There was another pause before Clarissa could answer the question. "No," she said; "no, he isn't a lover. We don't have any lovers at Popham Villa." "Only that's not quite true," she said, after a pause. "And as you are to live with us just like a sister, I'll tell you about Gregory Newton, Ralph's brother." Then she did tell the story of the clergyman's love and the clergyman's discomfiture; but she said not a word of Ralph's declaration and Ralph's great sin on that fatal evening. And the way in which she told her story about the one brother altogether disarmed Mary Bonner's suspicion as to the other.

In truth Clarissa did not know whether it was or was not her privilege to regard Ralph Newton as her lover. He had not been to the cottage since that evening; and though the words he had spoken were still sweet in her ears,—so sweet that she could not endure the thought of abandoning their sweetness,—still she had a misgiving that they were in some sort rendered nugatory by his great fault. She had forgiven the fault;—looking back at it now over the distance of eight or ten days, had forgiven it with all her heart; but still there remained with her an undefined

and unpleasant feeling that the spoken words, accompanied by a deed so wicked, were absorbed, and, as it were, drowned in the wickedness of the deed. What if the words as first spoken were only a prelude to the deed,— for, as she well remembered, they had been spoken twice,—and if the subsequent words were only an excuse for it! There was a painful idea in her mind that such might possibly be the case, and that if so, the man could never be forgiven, or at least ought never to be spoken to again. Acting on this suggestion from within, she absolutely refused to tell her father what had happened when Patience urged her to do so. "He'll come and see papa himself,—if he means anything," said Clary. Patience only shook her head. She thought that Sir Thomas should be told at once; but she could not take upon herself to divulge her sister's secret, which had been imparted to her in trust.

Clarissa was obstinate. She would not tell her father, nor would she say what would be her own answer if her father were to give his permission for the match. As to this Patience had not much doubt. She saw that her sister's heart was set upon this lover. She had feared it before this late occurrence, and now she could hardly have a doubt. But if Ralph really meant it he would hardly have told her that he loved her, and then not waited for an answer,—not have come back for an answer,—not have gone to their father for an answer. And then Patience thought, Sir Thomas would never consent to this marriage. Ralph was in debt, and a scapegrace, and quite unfit to undertake the management of a wife. Such was the elder sister's belief as to her father's mind. But she could not force

upon Clary the necessity of taking any action in the matter. She was not strong enough in her position as elder to demand obedience. Clarissa's communication had been made in confidence; and Patience, though she was unhappy, would not break the trust.

At last this young Lothario appeared among them again; but as it happened, he came in company with Sir Thomas. Such a thing had not happened before since the day on which Sir Thomas had given up all charge of his ward's property. But it did so happen now. The two men had met in London, and Sir Thomas had suggested that Ralph should come and be introduced to the new cousin.

"What are you doing now?" Sir Thomas had asked.

"Nothing particular just at present."

"You can get away this evening?"

"Yes,—I think I can get away." It had been his intention to dine at his club with Captain Cox; but as he had dined at the club with Captain Cox on the previous day, the engagement was not felt to be altogether binding. "I can get away for dinner that is, but I've got to go out in the evening. It's a bore, but I promised to be at Lady McMarshal's to-night. But if I show there at twelve it will do." Thus it happened that Sir Thomas and Ralph Newton went down to Popham Villa in a cab together.

It was clear both to Patience and Clarissa, that he was much struck with the new cousin; but then it was quite out of the question that any man should not be struck with her. Her beauty was of that kind,—like the beauty of a picture,—which must strike even if it fails to charm. And Mary had a way of exciting at-

tention with strangers, even by her silence. It was hardly intentional, and there certainly was no coquetry in it; but it was the case that she carried herself after a fashion which made it impossible for any stranger to regard her place in the room as being merely a chair with a young lady in it. She would speak hardly a word; but her very lack of speech was eloquent. At the present time she was of course in deep mourning, and the contrast between the brilliance of her complexion and the dark dress which covered her throat; between the black scarf and the profusion of bright hair which fell upon it, was so remarkable as of itself to excite attention. Clarissa, watching everything, though, with feminine instinct, seeming to watch nothing, could see that he was amazed. But then she had known that he would be amazed. And of what matter would be his amazement, if he were true? If, indeed, he were not true,—then, then,—then nothing mattered! Such was the light in which Clary viewed the circumstances around her at the present moment.

The evening did not pass very pleasantly. Ralph was introduced to the cousin, and asked some questions about the West Indies. Then there was tea. Ralph was dressed, with a black coat and white cravat, and Clary could not keep herself from thinking how very much nicer he was with a pipe in his mouth, and his neck bare, drinking soda-water and sherry out on the lawn. Ah,—in spite of all that had then happened, that was the sweetest moment in her existence, when he jumped up from the ground and told her that he might do a great deal better than marry the West Indian cousin. She thought now of his very words, and suggested to herself that perhaps he would never say

them again. Nay;—might it not be possible that he would say the very reverse, that he would declare his wish to marry the West Indian cousin? Clary could not conceive but that he might have her should he so wish. Young ladies, when they are in love, are prone to regard their lovers as being prizes so valuable as to be coveted by all female comers.

Before Ralph had taken his leave Sir Thomas took Mary apart to make some communication to her as to her own affairs. Everything was now settled, and Sir Thomas had purchased stock for her with her little fortune. "You have £20 2*s.* 4*d.* a year, quite your own," he said, laughing;—as he might have done to one of his own girls, had an unexpected legacy been left to her.

"That means that I must be altogether dependent on your charity," she said, looking into his face through her tears.

"It means nothing of the kind," he said, with almost the impetuosity of anger. "There shall be no such cold word as charity between you and me. You are one of us now, and of my cup and of my loaf it is your right to partake, as it is the right of those girls there. I shall never think of it, or speak of it again."

"But I must think of it, uncle."

"The less the better;—but never use that odious word again between you and me. It is a word for strangers. What is given as I give to you should be taken without even an acknowledgment. My payment is to be your love."

"You shall be paid in full," she said, as she kissed him. This was all very well, but still on his part there

was some misgiving,—some misgiving, though no doubt. If he were to die what would become of her? He must make a new will,—which in itself was to him a terrible trouble; and he must take something from his own girls in order that he might provide for this new daughter. That question of adopting is very difficult. If a man have no children of his own,—none others that are dependent on him,—he can give all, and there is an end of his trouble. But a man feels that he owes his property to his children; and, so feeling, may he take it from them and give it to others? Had she been in truth his daughter, he would have felt that there was enough for three; but she was not his daughter, and yet he was telling her that she should be to him the same as a child of his house!

In the meantime Ralph was out on the lawn with the two sisters, and was as awkward as men always are in such circumstances. When he spoke those words to Clarissa he had in truth no settled purpose in his mind. He had always liked her,—loved her after a fashion,—felt for her an affection different to that which he entertained for her sister. Nevertheless, most assuredly he had not come down to Fulham on that evening prepared to make her an offer. He had been there by chance, and it had been quite by chance that he found Clarissa alone. He knew that the words had been spoken, and he knew also that he had drawn down her wrath upon his head by his caress. He was man enough also to feel that he had no right to believe himself to have been forgiven, because now, in the presence of others, she did not receive him with a special coldness which would have demanded special explanation. As it was, the three

were all cold. Patience half felt inclined to go and leave them together. She would have given a finger off her hand to make Clary happy;—but would it be right to make Clary happy in such fashion as this? She had thought at first when she saw her father and Ralph together, that Ralph had spoken of his love to Sir Thomas, and that Sir Thomas had allowed him to come; but she soon perceived that this was not the case: and so they walked about together, each knowing that their intercourse was not as it always had been, and each feeling powerless to resume an appearance of composure.

"I have got to go and be at Lady McMarshal's," he said, after having suffered in this way for a quarter of an hour. "If I did not show myself there her ladyship would think that I had given over all ideas of propriety, and that I was a lost sheep past redemption."

"Don't let us keep you if you ought to go," said Clary, with dismal propriety.

"I think I'll be off. Good-bye, Patience. The new cousin is radiant in beauty. No one can doubt that. But I don't know whether she is exactly the sort of girl I admire most. By-the-bye, what do you mean to do with her?"

"Do with her?" said Patience. "She will live here, of course."

"Just settle down as one of the family? Then, no doubt, I shall see her again. Good-night, Patience. Good-bye, Clary. I'll just step in and make my adieux to Sir Thomas and the beauty." This he did;—but as he went he pressed Clary's hand in a manner that

she could not but understand. She did not return the pressure, but she did not resent it.

"Clarissa," said Patience, when they were together that night, "dear Clarissa!"

Clary knew that when she was called Clarissa by her sister something special was meant. "What is it?" she asked. "What are you going to say now?"

"You know that I am thinking only of your happiness. My darling, he doesn't mean it."

"How do you know? What right have you to say so? Why am I to be thought such a fool as not to know what I ought to do?"

"Nobody thinks that you are a fool, Clary. I know how clever you are,—and how good. But I cannot bear that you should be unhappy. If he had meant it, he would have spoken to papa. If you will only tell me that you are not thinking of him, that he is not making you unhappy, I will not say a word further."

"I am thinking of him, and he is making me unhappy," said Clarissa, bursting into tears. "But I don't know why you should say that he is a liar, and dishonest, and everything that is bad."

"I have neither said that, nor thought it, Clary."

"That is what you mean. He did say that he loved me."

"And you,—you did not answer him?"

"No;—I said nothing. I can't explain it, and I don't want to explain it. I did not say a word to him. You came; and then he went away. If I am to be unhappy, I can't help it. He did say that he loved me, and I do love him."

"Will you tell papa?"

"No;—I will not. It would be out of the question. He would go to Ralph, and there would be a row, and I would not have it for worlds." Then she tried to smile. "Other girls are unhappy, and I don't see why I'm to be better off than the rest. I know I am a fool. You'll never be unhappy, because you are not a fool. But, Patience, I have told you everything, and if you are not true to me I will never forgive you." Patience promised that she would be true; and then they embraced and were friends.

CHAPTER VIII.

Ralph Newton's Troubles.

JULY had come, the second week in July, and Ralph Newton had not as yet given any reply to that very definite proposition which had been made to him after the little dinner by Mr. Neefit. Now the proposition was one which certainly required an answer; —and all the effect which it had hitherto had upon our friend was to induce him not to include Conduit Street in any of his daily walks. It has already been said that before the offer was made to him, when he believed that Polly's fortune would be more than Mr. Neefit had been able to promise, he had determined that nothing should induce him to marry the daughter of a breeches-maker; and therefore the answer might have been easy. Nevertheless he made no answer, but kept out of Conduit Street, and allowed the three pair of breeches to be sent home to him without trying them on. This was very wrong; for Mr. Neefit, though perhaps indelicate, had at least been generous

and trusting;—and a definite answer should have been given before the middle of July.

Troubles were coming thick upon Ralph Newton. He had borrowed a hundred pounds from Mr. Neefit, but this he had done under pressure of a letter from his brother the parson. He owed the parson,—we will not say how much. He would get fifty pounds or a hundred from the parson every now and again, giving an assurance that it should be repaid in a month or six weeks. Sometimes the promise would be kept,—and sometimes not. The parson, as a bachelor, was undoubtedly a rich man. He had a living of £400 a year, and some fortune of his own; but he had tastes of his own, and was repairing the church at Peele Newton, his parish in Hampshire. It would therefore sometimes happen that he was driven to ask his brother for money. The hundred pounds which had been borrowed from Mr. Neefit had been sent down to Peele Newton with a mere deduction of twenty-five pounds for current expenses. Twenty-five pounds do not go far in current expenses in London with a man who is given to be expensive, and Ralph Newton was again in want of funds.

And there were other troubles, all coming from want of money. Mr. Horsball, of the Moonbeam, who was generally known in the sporting world as a man who never did ask for his money, had remarked that as Mr. Newton's bill was now above a thousand, he should like a little cash. Mr. Newton's bill at two months for £500 would be quite satisfactory. "Would Mr. Newton accept the enclosed document?" Mr. Newton did accept the document, but he didn't like it. How was he to pay £500 in the beginning of

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September, unless indeed he got it from Mr. Neefit? He might raise money, no doubt, on his own interest in the Newton Priory estate. But that estate would never be his were he to die before his uncle, and he knew that assistance from the Jews on such security would ruin him altogether. Of his own property there was still a remnant left. He owned houses in London from which he still got some income. But they were mortgaged, and the title-deeds not in his possession, and his own attorney made difficulties about obtaining for him a further advance.

He was sitting one bright July morning in his own room in St. James's Street, over a very late breakfast, with his two friends, Captain Fooks and Lieutenant Cox, when a little annoyance of a similar kind fell upon him;—a worse annoyance, indeed, than that which had come from Mr. Horsball, for Mr. Horsball had not been spiteful enough to call upon him. There came a knock at his door, and young Mr. Moggs was ushered into the room. Now Mr. Moggs was the son of Booby and Moggs, the well-known bootmakers of Old Bond Street; and the boots they had made for Ralph Newton had been infinite in number, as they had also, no doubt, been excellent in make and leather. But Booby and Moggs had of late wanted money, had written many letters, and for four months had not seen the face of their customer. When a gentleman is driven by his indebtedness to go to another tradesman, it is, so to say, "all up with him" in the way of credit. There is nothing the tradesman dislikes so much as this, as he fears that the rival is going to get the ready money after he has given the credit. And yet what is a gentleman to do when his

demand for further goods at the old shop is met by a request for a little ready money? We know what Ralph Newton did at the establishment in Conduit Street. But then Mr. Neefit was a very peculiar man.

Cox had just lighted his cigar, and Fooks was filling his pipe when Ontario Moggs entered the room. This rival in the regards of Polly Neefit was not at that time personally known to Ralph Newton; but the name, as mentioned by his servant, was painfully familiar to him. "Oh, Mr. Moggs,—ah;—it's your father, I suppose, that I know. Sit down, Mr. Moggs; —will you have a cup of tea;—or perhaps a glass of brandy? Take a cigar, Mr. Moggs." But Moggs declined all refreshment for the body. He was a tall, thin, young man, with long straggling hair, a fierce eye, very thick lips, and a flat nose,—a nose which seemed to be all nostril;—and then, below his mouth was a tuft of beard, which he called an imperial. It was the glory of Ontario Moggs to be a politician;—it was his ambition to be a poet;—it was his nature to be a lover;—it was his disgrace to be a bootmaker. Dependent on a stern father, and aware that it behoved him to earn his bread, he could not but obey; but he groaned under this servitude to trade, and was only happy when speaking at his debating club, held at the Cheshire Cheese, or when basking in the beauty of Polly Neefit. He was great upon Strikes,—in reference to which perilous subject he was altogether at variance with his father, who worshipped capital and hated unions. Ontario held horrible ideas about co-operative associations, the rights of labour, and the welfare of the masses. Thrice he had quarrelled with his father;—but the old man loved his son, and though

he was stern, strove to bring the young man into the ways of money-making. How was he to think of marrying Polly Neefit,—as to the expediency of which arrangement Mr. Moggs senior quite agreed with Mr. Moggs junior,—unless he would show himself to be a man of business? Did he think that old Neefit would give his money to be wasted upon strikes? Ontario, who was as honest a fool as ever lived, told his father that he didn't care a straw for Neefit's money. Then Moggs the father had made a plunge against the counter with his sharp-pointed shoemaker's knife, which he always held in his hand, that had almost been fatal to himself; for the knife broke at the thrust, and the fragment cut his wrist. At this time there was no real Booby, and the firm was in truth Moggs, and Moggs only. The great question was whether it should become Moggs and Son. But what tradesman would take a partner into his firm who began by declaring that strikes were the safeguards of trade, and that he,—the proposed partner,—did not personally care for money? Nevertheless old Moggs persevered; and Ontario, alive to the fact that it was his duty to be a bootmaker, was now attempting to carry on his business in the manner laid down for him by his father.

A worse dun,—a dun with less power of dunning,—than Ontario Moggs could not be conceived. His only strength lay in his helplessness. When he found that Mr. Newton had two friends with him, his lips were sealed. To ask for money at all was very painful to him, but to ask for it before three men was beyond his power. Ralph Newton, seeing something of this, felt that generosity demanded of him that he

should sacrifice himself. "I'm afraid you've come about your bill, Mr. Moggs," he said. Ontario Moggs, who on the subject of Trades' Unions at the Cheshire Cheese could pour forth a flood of eloquence that would hold the room in rapt admiration, and then bring down a tumult of applause, now stammered out a half-expressed assent. "As Mr. Newton was engaged, perhaps he had better call again."

"Well;—thankee, yes. It would be as well. But what's the total, Mr. Moggs?" Ontario could not bring himself to mention the figures, but handed a paper to our friend. "Bless my soul! that's very bad," said our friend. "Over two hundred pounds for boots! How long can your father give me?"

"He's a little pressed just at present," whispered Moggs.

"Yes;—and he has my bill, which he was forced to take up at Christmas. It's quite true." Moggs said not a word, though he had been especially commissioned to instruct the debtor that his father would be forced to apply through his solicitor, unless he should receive at least half the amount due before the end of the next week. "Tell your father that I will certainly call within the next three days and tell him what I can do;—or, at least, what I can't do. You are sure you won't take a cigar?" Moggs was quite sure that he wouldn't take a cigar, and retired, thanking Ralph as though some excellent arrangement had been made which would altogether prevent further difficulties.

"That's the softest chap I ever saw," said Lieutenant Cox.

"I wish my fellows would treat me like that," said Captain Fooks. "But I never knew a fellow have the luck that Newton has. I don't suppose I owe a tenth of what you do."

"That's your idea of luck?" said Ralph.

"Well;—yes. I owe next to nothing, but I'll be hanged if I can get anything done for me without being dunned up to my very eyes. You know that chap of Neefit's? I'm blessed if he didn't ask me whether I meant to settle last year's bill, before he should send me home a couple of cords I ordered! Now I don't owe Neefit twenty pounds if all was told."

"What did you do?" asked Lieutenant Cox.

"I just walked out of the shop. Now I shall see whether they're sent or not. They tell me there's a fellow down at Rugby makes just as well as Neefit, and never bothers you at all. What do you owe Neefit, Newton?"

"Untold sums."

"But how much really?"

"Don't you hear me say the sums are untold?"

"Oh; d—n it; I don't understand that. I'm never dark about anything of that kind. I'll go bail it's more than five times what I do."

"Very likely. If you had given your orders generously, as I have done, you would have been treated nobly. What good has a man in looking at twenty pounds on his books? Of course he must get in the small sums."

"I suppose there's something in that," said the captain thoughtfully. At this moment the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of another emis-

sary,—an emissary from that very establishment to which they were alluding. It was Ralph Newton's orders that no one should ever be denied to him when he was really in his rooms. He had fought the battle long enough to know that such denials create unnecessary animosity. And then, as he had said, they were simply the resources of a coward. It was the duty of a brave man to meet his enemy face to face. Fortune could never give him the opportunity of doing that pleasantly, in the field, as might happen any day to his happy friends, Captain Fooks and Lieutenant Cox; but he was determined that he would accustom himself to stand fire;—and that, therefore, he would never run away from a dun. Now there slipped very slowly into the room, that most mysterious person who was commonly called Herr Bawwah,—much to the astonishment of the three young gentlemen, as the celebrated cutter of leather had never previously been seen by either of them elsewhere than standing silent at his board in Neefit's shop, with his knife in his hands. They looked at one another, and the two military gentlemen thought that Mr. Neefit was very much in earnest when he sent Bawwah to look for his money. Mr. Neefit was very much in earnest; but on this occasion his emissary had not come for money. "What, Herr Bawwah;—is that you?" said Ralph, making the best he could of the name. "Is there anything wrong at the shop?" The German looked slowly round the room, and then handed to the owner of it a little note without a word.

Ralph read the note,—to himself. It was written on one of the shop bills, and ran as follows:—"Have you thought of what I was saying? If so, I should be

happy to see Mr. Newton either in Conduit Street or at Alexandrina Cottage." There was neither signature nor date. Ralph knew what he was called upon to do, as well as though four pages of an elaborate epistle had been indited to him. And he knew, too, that he was bound to give an answer. He asked the "Herr" to sit down, and prepared to write an answer at once. He offered the Herr a glass of brandy, which the Herr swallowed at a gulp. He handed the Herr a cigar, which the Herr pocketed;—and in gratitude for the latter favour some inarticulate grunt of thanks was uttered. Ralph at once wrote his reply, while the two friends smoked, looked on, and wondered. "Dear Mr. Neefit,—I will be with you at eleven to-morrow morning. Yours most truly, RALPH NEWTON." This he handed, with another glass of brandy, to the Herr. The Herr swallowed the second glass,—as he would have done a third had it been offered to him,—and then took his departure.

"That was another dun;—eh, Newton?" asked the lieutenant.

"What a conjuror you are!" said Ralph.

"I never heard of his sending Bawwah out before," said the captain.

"He never does under two hundred and fifty pounds," said Ralph. "It's a mark of the greatest respect. If I wore nothing but brown cords, like you, I never should have seen the Herr here."

"I never had a pair of brown cords in my life!" said the offended captain. After this the conversation fell away, and the two warriors went off to their military occupations at the Horse Guards, where, no doubt,

the Commander-in-chief was waiting for them with impatience.

Ralph Newton had much to think of, and much that required thinking of at once. Did he mean to make an offer to Clary Underwood? Did he mean to take Polly Neefit and her £20,000? Did he mean to marry at all? Did he mean to go to the dogs? Had he ever in his life seen anybody half so beautiful as Mary Bonner? What was he to say to Mr. Moggs? How was he to manage about that £500 which Horsball would demand of him in September? In what terms could he speak to Neefit of the money due both for breeches and the loan, in the event of his declining Polly? And then, generally, how was he to carry on the war? He was thoroughly disgusted with himself as he thought of all the evil that he had done, and of the good which he had omitted to do. While he was yet at college Sir Thomas had been anxious that he should be called to the Bar, and had again and again begged of him to consent to this as a commencement of his life in London. But Ralph had replied,—and had at last replied with so much decision that Sir Thomas had abandoned the subject,—that as it was out of the question that he should ever make money at the Bar, the fact of his being called would be useless to him. He argued that he need not waste his life because he was not a lawyer. It was not his intention to waste his life. He had a sufficient property of his own at once, and must inherit a much larger property later in life. He would not be called to the Bar, nor would he go into the army, nor would he go abroad for any lengthened course of travelling. He was fond of hunting, but he would keep his hunting

within measure. Surely an English private gentleman might live to some profit in his own country! He would go out in honours, and take a degree, and then make himself happy among his books. Such had been his own plan for himself at twenty-one. At twenty-two he had quarrelled with the tutor at his college, and taken his name off the books without any degree. About this, too, he had argued with Sir Thomas, expressing a strong opinion that a university degree was in England, of all pretences, the most vain and hollow. At twenty-three he began his career at the Moonbeam with two horses,—and from that day to this hunting had been the chief aim of his life. During the last winter he had hunted six days a week,—assuring Sir Thomas, however, that at the end of that season his wild oats would have been sown as regarded that amusement, and that henceforth he should confine himself to two days a week. Since that he had justified the four horses which still remained at the Moonbeam by the alleged fact that horses were drugs in April, but would be pearls of price in November. Sir Thomas could only expostulate, and when he did so, his late ward and present friend, though he was always courteous, would always argue. Then he fell, as was natural, into intimacies with such men as Cox and Fooks. There was no special harm either in Cox or Fooks; but no one knew better than did Ralph Newton himself that they were not such friends as he had promised himself when he was younger.

Fathers, guardians, and the race of old friends generally, hardly ever give sufficient credit to the remorse which young men themselves feel when they

gradually go astray. They see the better as plainly as do their elders, though they so often follow the worse, —as not unfrequently do the elders also. Ralph Newton passed hardly a day of his life without a certain amount of remorse in that he had not managed himself better than he had done, and was now doing. He knew that Fortune had been very good to him, and that he had hitherto wasted all her gifts. And now there came the question whether it was as yet too late to retrieve the injury which he had done. He did believe,—not even as yet doubting his power to do well,—that everything might be made right, only that his money difficulties pressed him so hardly. He took pen and paper, and made out a list of his debts, heading the catalogue with Mr. Horsball of the Moonbeam. The amount, when added together, came to something over four thousand pounds, including a debt of three hundred to his brother the parson. Then he endeavoured to value his property, and calculated that if he sold all that was remaining to him he might pay what he owed and have something about fifty pounds per annum left to live upon till he should inherit his uncle's property. But he doubted the accuracy even of this, knowing that new and unexpected debts will always crop up when the day of settlement arrives. Of course he could not live upon fifty pounds a year. It would have seemed to him to be almost equally impossible to live upon four times fifty pounds. He had given Sir Thomas a promise that he would not raise money on post-obits on his uncle's life, and hitherto he had kept that promise. He thought that he would be guilty of no breach of promise were he so to obtain funds, telling Sir Thomas of his purpose,

and asking the lawyer's assistance; but he knew that if he did this all his chance of future high prosperity would be at an end. His uncle might live these twenty years, and in that time he, Ralph, might quite as readily die. Money might no doubt be raised, but this could only be done at a cost which would be utterly ruinous to him. There was one way out of his difficulty. He might marry a girl with money. A girl with money had been offered to him, and a girl, too, who was very pretty and very pleasant. But then, to marry the daughter of a breeches-maker!

And why not? He had been teaching himself all his life to despise conventionalities. He had ridiculed degrees. He had laughed at the rank and standing of a barrister. "The rank is but the guinea stamp—the man's the gowd for a' that." How often had he declared to himself and others that that should be his motto through life. And might not he be as much a man, and would not his metal be as pure, with Polly Neefit for his wife as though he were to marry a duchess? As for love, he thought he could love Polly dearly. He knew that he had done some wrong in regard to poor Clary; but he by no means knew how much wrong he had done. A single word of love,—which had been so very much to her in her innocence, —had been so little to him who was not innocent. If he could allow himself to choose out of all the women he had ever seen, he would, he thought, instigated rather by the ambition of having the loveliest woman in the world for his wife than by any love, have endeavoured to win Mary Bonner as his own. But that was out of the question. Mary Bonner was as poor as himself; and, much as he admired her, he certainly

could not tell himself that he loved her. Polly Neefit would pull him through all his difficulties. Nevertheless, he could not make up his mind to ask Polly Neefit to be his wife.

But he must make up his mind either that he would or that he would not. He must see Mr. Neefit on the morrow;—and within the next few days he must call on Mr. Moggs, unless he broke his word. And in two months' time he must have £500 for Mr. Horsball. Suppose he were to go to Sir Thomas, tell his whole story without reserve, and ask his old friend's advice! Everything without reserve he could not tell. He could say nothing to the father of that scene on the lawn with Clarissa. But of his own pecuniary difficulties, and of Mr. Neefit's generous offer, he was sure that he could tell the entire truth. He did go to Southampton Buildings, and after some harsh language between himself and Mr. Stemm,—Sir Thomas being away at the time,—he managed to make an appointment for nine o'clock that evening at his late guardian's chambers. At nine o'clock precisely he found himself seated with Sir Thomas, all among the books in Southampton Buildings. "Perhaps you'll have a cup of tea," said Sir Thomas. "Stemm, give us some tea." Ralph waited till the tea was handed to him and Stemm was gone. Then he told his story.

He told it very fairly as against himself. He brought out his little account and explained to the lawyer how it was that he made himself out to be worth fifty pounds a year, and no more.

"Oh, heavens, what a mess you have made of it!" said the lawyer, holding up both his hands.

"No doubt I have," said Ralph—"a terrible mess!

But as I now come to you for advice hear me out to the end. You can say nothing as to my folly which I do not know already."

"Go on," said Sir Thomas. "Go on,—I'll hear you."

It may, however, be remarked, by the way, that when an old gentleman in Sir Thomas's position is asked his advice under such circumstances, he ought to be allowed to remark that he had prophesied all these things beforehand. "I told you so," is such a comfortable thing to say! And when an old gentleman has taken much fruitless trouble about a young gentleman, he ought at least not to be interrupted in his remarks as to that young gentleman's folly. But Ralph was energetic, and, knowing that he had a point before him, would go on with his story. "And now," he said, "I am coming to a way of putting these things right which has been suggested to me. You won't like it, I know. But it would put me on my legs."

"Raising money on your expectations?" said Sir Thomas.

"No;—that is what I must come to if this plan don't answer."

"Anything will be better than that," said Sir Thomas.

Then Ralph dashed at the suggestion of marriage without further delay.

"You have heard of Mr. Neefit, the breeches-maker!" It so happened that Sir Thomas never had heard of Mr. Neefit. "Well;—he is a tradesman in Conduit Street. He has a daughter, and he will give her twenty thousand pounds."

"You don't mean to run away with the breeches-maker's daughter?" ejaculated Sir Thomas.

"Certainly not. I shouldn't get the twenty thousand pounds if I did." Then he explained it all;—how Neefit had asked him to the house, and offered him the girl; how the girl herself was as pretty and nice as a girl could be; and how he thought,—though as to that he expressed himself with some humility,—that, were he to propose to her, the girl might perhaps take him.

"I dare say she would," said Sir Thomas.

"Well;—now you know it all. In her way, she has been educated. Neefit père is utterly illiterate and ignorant. He is an honest man, as vulgar as he can be,—or rather as unlike you and me, which is what men mean when they talk of vulgarity,—and he makes the best of breeches. Neefit mère is worse than the father, being cross and ill-conditioned, as far as I can see. Polly is as good as gold; and if I put a house over my head with her money, of course her father and her mother will be made welcome there. Your daughters would not like to meet them, but I think they could put up with Polly. Now you know about all that I can tell you."

Ralph had been so rapid, so energetic, and withal so reasonable, that Sir Thomas, at this period of the interview, was unable to refer to any of his prophecies. What advice was he to give? Should he adjure this young man not to marry the breeches-maker's daughter because of the blood of the Newtons and the expected estate, or were he to do so even on the score of education and general unfitness, he must suggest some other mode or means of living. But how could he

advise the future Newton of Newton Priory to marry Polly Neefit? The Newtons had been at Newton Priory for centuries, and the men Newtons had always married ladies, as the women Newtons had always either married gentlemen or remained unmarried. Sir Thomas, too, was of his nature, and by all his convictions, opposed to such matches. "You have hardly realised," said he, "what it would be to have such a father-in-law and such a mother-in-law;—or probably such a wife."

"Yes, I have. I have realised all that."

"Of course, if you have made up your mind——"

"But I have not made up my mind, Sir Thomas. I must make it up before eleven o'clock to-morrow morning, because I must then be with Neefit,—by appointment. At this moment I am so much in doubt that I am almost inclined to toss up."

"I would sooner cut my throat!" said Sir Thomas, forgetting his wisdom amidst the perplexities of his position.

"Not quite that, Sir Thomas. I suppose you mean to say that anything would be better than such a marriage?"

"I don't suppose you care for the girl," said Sir Thomas, crossly.

"I do not feel uneasy on that score. If I did not like her, and think that I could love her, I would have nothing to do with it. She herself is charming,—though I should lie if I were to say that she were a lady."

"And the father offered her to you?"

"Most distinctly,—and named the fortune."

"Knowing your own condition as to money?"

"Almost exactly;—so much so that I do not doubt he will go on with it when he knows everything. He had heard about my uncle's property, and complimented me by saying that I am a—gentleman."

"He does not deserve to have a daughter," said Sir Thomas.

"I don't know about that. According to his lights, he means to do the best he can for her. And, indeed, I think myself that he might do worse. She will probably become Mrs. Newton of Newton Priory if she marries me; and the investment of Neefit's twenty thousand pounds won't be so bad."

"Nothing on earth can make her a lady."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Ralph. "Nothing on earth can make her mother a lady; but of Polly I should have hopes. You, however, are against it?"

"Certainly."

"Then what ought I to do?" Sir Thomas rubbed the calf of his leg and was silent. "The only advice you have given me hitherto was to cut my throat," said Ralph.

"No, I didn't. I don't know what you're to do. You've ruined yourself;—that's all."

"But there is a way out of the ruin. In all emergencies there is a better and a worse course. What, now, is the better course?"

"You don't know how to earn a shilling," said Sir Thomas.

"No; I don't," said Ralph Newton.

Sir Thomas rubbed his face and scratched his head; but did not know how to give advice. "You have made your bed, and you must lie upon it," he said.

"Exactly;—but which way am I to get into it, and which way shall I get out?" Sir Thomas could only rub his face and scratch his head. "I thought it best to come and tell you everything," said Ralph. That was all very well, but Sir Thomas would not advise him to marry the breeches-maker's daughter.

"It is a matter," Sir Thomas said at last, "in which you must be guided by your own feelings. I wish it were otherwise. I can say no more." Then Ralph took his leave, and wandered all round St. James's Park and the purlieus of Westminster till midnight, endeavouring to make up his mind, and building castles in the air, as to what he would do with himself, and how he would act, if he had not brought himself into so hopeless a mess of troubles.

CHAPTER IX.

Ontario Moggs.

On the following morning Ralph Newton was in Conduit Street exactly at the hour named. He had not even then made up his mind;—but he thought that he might get an extension of the time allowed him for decision. After all, it was hardly a month yet since the proposition was made to him. He found Mr. Neefit in the back shop, measuring a customer.

"I'll be with you in two minutes," said Mr. Neefit, just putting his head through the open door, and then going back to his work; 3—1—⅛, Waddle; Sir George isn't quite as stout as he was last year. Oh, no, Sir George; we won't tie you in too tight. Leave it to us, Sir George. The last pair too tight? Oh, no; I think not, Sir George. Perhaps your man isn't as

careful in cleaning as he ought to be. Gentlemen's servants do get so careless, it quite sickens one!" So Mr. Neefit went on, and as Sir George was very copious in the instructions which he had to give,—all of which, by-the-bye, were absolutely thrown away,—Ralph Newton became tired of waiting. He remembered too that he was not there as a customer, but almost as a member of the family, and the idea sickened him. He bethought himself that on his first visit to Conduit Street he had seen his Polly in the shop, cutting up strips wherewith her father would measure gentlemen's legs. She must then have been nearly fifteen, and the occupation, as he felt, was not one fitting for the girl who was to be his wife.

"Now, Mr. Newton," said Mr. Neefit, as Sir George at last left the little room. The day was hot, and Mr. Neefit had been at work in his shirt sleeves. Nor did he now put on his coat. He wiped his brow, put his cotton handkerchief inside his braces, and shook hands with our hero. "Well, Mr. Newton," he said, "what do you think of it? I couldn't learn much about it, but it seemed to me that you and Polly got on famous that night. I thought we'd have seen you out there again before this."

"I couldn't come, Mr. Neefit, as long as there was a doubt."

"Oh, as to doubts,—doubts be bothered. Of course you must run your chance with Polly like any other man."

"Just so."

"But the way to get a girl like that isn't not to come and see her for a month. There are others

after our Polly, I can tell you;—and men who would take her with nothing but her smock on."

"I'm quite sure of that. No one can see her without admiring her."

"Then what's the good of talking of doubts? I like you because you are a gentleman;—and I can put you on your legs, which, from all I hear, is a kind of putting you want bad enough just at present. Say the word, and come down to tea this evening."

"The fact is, Mr. Neefit, this is a very serious matter."

"Serious! Twenty thousand pounds is serious. There ain't a doubt about that. If you mean to say you don't like the bargain,"—and as he said this there came a black cloud upon Mr. Neefit's brow,—"you've only got to say the word. Our Polly is not to be pressed upon any man. But don't let's have any shilly-shallying."

"Tell me one thing, Mr. Neefit."

"Well;—what's that?"

"Have you spoken to your daughter about this?"

Mr. Neefit was silent for a moment. "Well, no; I haven't," he said. "But I spoke to her mother, and women is always talking. Mind, I don't know what our Polly would say to you, but I do think she expects something. There's a chap lives nigh to us who used always to be sneaking round; but she has snubbed him terribly this month past. So my wife tells me. You come and try, Mr. Newton, and then you'll know all about it."

Ralph was aware that he had not as yet begun to explain his difficulty to the anxious father. "You see, Mr. Neefit," he said—and then he paused. It had

been much easier for him to talk to Sir Thomas than to the breeches-maker.

"If you don't like it,—say so," said Mr. Neefit;—"and don't let us have no shilly-shallying."

"I do like it."

"Then give us your hand, and come out this evening and have a bit of some'at to eat and a drop of some'at hot, and pop the question. That's about the way to do it."

"Undoubtedly;—but marriage is such a serious thing!"

"So it is serious,—uncommon serious to owe a fellow a lot of money you can't pay him. I call that very serious."

"Mr. Neefit, I owe you nothing but what I can pay you."

"You're very slow about it, Mr. Newton; that's all I can say. But I wasn't just talking of myself. After what's passed between you and me I ain't going to be hard upon you."

"I'll tell you what, Mr. Neefit," said Ralph at last —"of course you can understand that a man may have difficulties with his family."

"Because of my being a breeches-maker?" said Neefit contemptuously.

"I won't say that; but there may be difficulties."

"Twenty thousand pounds does away with a deal of them things."

"Just so;—but as I was saying, you can understand that there may be family difficulties. I only say that because I ought perhaps to have given you an answer sooner. I won't go down with you this evening."

"You won't?"

"Not to-night;—but I'll be with you on Saturday evening, if that will suit you."

"Come and have a bit of dinner again on Sunday," said Neefit. Ralph accepted the invitation, shook hands with Neefit, and escaped from the shop.

When he thought of it all as he went to his rooms, he told himself that he had now as good as engaged himself to Polly;—as good or as bad. Of course, after what had passed, he could not go to the house again without asking her to be his wife. Were he to do so Neefit would be justified in insulting him. And yet when he undertook to make this fourth visit to the cottage, he had done so with the intention of allowing himself a little more time for judgment. He saw plainly enough that he was going to allow himself to drift into this marriage without any real decision of his own. He prided himself on being strong, and how could any man be more despicably weak than this? It was, indeed, true that in all the arguments he had used with Sir Thomas he had defended the Neefit marriage as though it was the best course he could adopt;—and even Sir Thomas had not ultimately ventured to oppose it. Would it not be as well for him to consider that he had absolutely made up his mind to marry Polly?

On the Friday he called at Mr. Moggs's house; Mr. Moggs senior was there, and Mr. Moggs junior, and also a shopman. "I was sorry," said he, "that when your son called, I had friends with me, and could hardly explain circumstances."

"It didn't signify at all," said Moggs junior.

"But it does signify, Mr. Newton," said Moggs

senior, who on this morning was not in a good humour with his ledger. "Two hundred and seventeen pounds three shillings and four-pence is a good deal of money for boots, Mr. Newton. You must allow that."

"Indeed it is, Mr. Moggs."

"There hasn't been what you may call a settlement for years. Twenty-five pounds paid in the last two years!" and Mr. Moggs as he spoke had his finger on the fatal page. "That won't do, you know, Mr. Newton;—that won't do at all!" Mr. Moggs, as he looked into his customer's face, worked himself up into a passion. "But I suppose you have come to settle it now, Mr. Newton?"

"Not exactly at this moment, Mr. Moggs."

"It must be settled very soon, Mr. Newton;—it must indeed. My son can't be calling on you day after day, and all for nothing. We can't stand that, you know, Mr. Newton. Perhaps you'll oblige me by saying when it will be settled." Then Ralph explained that he had called for that purpose, that he was making arrangements for paying all his creditors, and that he hoped that Mr. Moggs would have his money within three months at the farthest. Mr. Moggs then proposed that he should have his customer's bill at three months, and the interview ended by the due manufacture of a document to that effect. Ralph, when he entered the shop, had not intended to give a bill; but the pressure had been too great upon him, and he had yielded. It would matter little, however, if he married Polly Neefit. And had he not now accepted it as his destiny that he must marry Polly Neefit?

The Saturday he passed in much trouble of spirit, and with many doubts; but the upshot of it all was that he would keep his engagement for the Sunday. His last chance of escape would have been to call in Conduit Street on the Saturday and tell Mr. Neefit, with such apologies as he might be able to make, that the marriage would not be suitable. While sitting at breakfast he had almost resolved to do this;—but when five o'clock came, after which, as he well knew, the breeches-maker would not be found, no such step had been taken. He dined that evening and went to the theatre with Lieutenant Cox. At twelve they were joined by Fooks and another gay spirit, and they ate chops and drank stout and listened to songs at Evans's till near two. Cox and Fooks said that they had never been so jolly in their lives;—but Ralph,—though he ate and drank as much and talked more than the others,—was far from happy. There came upon him a feeling that after to-morrow he would never again be able to call himself a gentleman. Who would associate with him after he had married the breeches-maker's daughter? He laid in bed late on Sunday, and certainly went to no place of worship. Would it not be well even yet to send a letter down to Neefit, telling him that the thing could not be? The man would be very angry with him, and would have great cause to be angry. But it would at least be better to do this now than hereafter. But when four o'clock came no letter had been sent.

Punctually at five the cab set him down at Alexandrina Cottage. How well he seemed to know the place;—almost as well as though he were already one of the family. He was shown into the drawing-room,

and whom should he see there, seated with Mr., Mrs. and Miss Neefit, but Ontario Moggs. It was clear enough that each of the party was ill at ease. Neefit welcomed him with almost boisterous hospitality. Mrs. Neefit merely curtseyed and bobbed at him. Polly smiled, and shook hands with him, and told him that he was welcome;—but even Polly was a little beside herself. Ontario Moggs stood bolt upright and made him a low bow, but did not attempt to speak.

"I hope your father is well?" said Ralph, addressing himself to Moggs junior.

"Pretty well, I thank you," said Mr. Moggs, getting up from his chair and bowing a second time.

Mr. Neefit waited for a moment or two during which no one except Ralph spoke a word, and then invited his intended son-in-law to follow him into the garden. "The fact is," said Neefit, winking, "this is Mrs. N.'s doing. It don't make any difference, you know."

"I don't quite understand," said Ralph.

"You see we've known Onty Moggs all our lives, and no doubt he has been sweet upon Polly. But Polly don't care for him, mind you. You ask her. And Mrs. N. has got it into her head that she don't want you for Polly. But I do, Mr. Newton;—and I'm master."

"I wouldn't for the world make a family quarrel."

"There won't be no quarrelling. It's I as has the purse, and it's the purse as makes the master, Mr. Newton. Don't you mind Moggs. Moggs is very well in his way, but he ain't going to have our Polly. Well; —he come down here to-day, just by chance;—and

what did Mrs. N. do but ask him to stop and eat a bit of dinner! It don't make any difference, you know. You come in now, and just go on as though Moggs weren't there. You and Polly shall have it all to yourselves this evening."

Here was a new feature added to the pleasures of his courtship! He had a rival,—and such a rival;—his own boot-maker, whom he could not pay, and whose father had insulted him a day or two since. Moggs junior would of course know why his customer was dining at Alexandrina Cottage, and would have his own feelings, too, upon the occasion.

"Don't you mind him,—no more than nothing," said Neefit, leading the way back into the drawing-room, and passing at the top of the kitchen stairs the young woman with the bit of salmon.

The dinner was not gay. In the first place, Neefit and Mrs. Neefit gave very explicit and very opposite directions as to the manner in which their guests were to walk in to dinner, the result of which was that Ralph was obliged to give his arm to the elder lady, while Ontario carried off the prize. Mrs. Neefit also gave directions as to the places, which were obeyed in spite of an attempt of Neefit's to contravene them. Ontario and Polly sat on one side of the table, while Ralph sat opposite to them. Neefit, when he saw that the arrangement was made and could not be altered, lost his temper and scolded his wife. "Law, papa, what does it matter?" said Polly. Polly's position certainly was unpleasant enough; but she made head against her difficulties gallantly. Ontario, who had begun to guess the truth, said not a word. He was not, however, long in making up his mind that a personal en-

counter with Mr. Ralph Newton might be good for his system. Mrs. Neefit nagged at her husband, and told him, when he complained about the meat, that if he would look after the drinkables that would be quite enough for him to do. Ralph himself found it to be impossible even to look as though things were going right. Never in his life had he been in a position so uncomfortable,—or, as he thought, so disreputable. It was not to be endured that Moggs, his boot-maker, should see him sitting at the table of Neefit, his breeches-maker.

The dinner was at last over, and the portwine was carried out into the arbour;—not, on this occasion, by Polly, but by the maid. Polly and Mrs. Neefit went off together, while Ralph crowded into the little summer-house with Moggs and Neefit. In this way half an hour was passed,—a half hour of terrible punishment. But there was worse coming. "Mr. Newton," said Neefit, "I think I heard something about your taking a walk with our Polly. If you like to make a start of it, don't let us keep you. Moggs and I will have a pipe together."

"I also intend to walk with Miss Neefit," said Ontario, standing up bravely.

"Two's company and three's none," said Neefit.

"No doubt," said Ontario; "no doubt. I feel that myself. Mr. Newton, I've been attached to Miss Neefit these two years. I don't mind saying it out straight before her father. I love Miss Neefit! I don't know, sir, what your ideas are; but I love Miss Neefit! Perhaps, sir, your ideas may be money;—my ideas are a pure affection for that young lady. Now, Mr. Newton, you know what my ideas are."

Mr. Moggs junior was standing up when he made this speech, and, when he had completed it, he looked round, first upon her father, and then upon his rival.

"She's never given you no encouragement," said Neefit. "How dare you speak in that way about my Polly?"

"I do dare," said Ontario. "There!"

"Will you tell Mr. Newton that she ever gave you any encouragement?"

Ontario thought about it for a moment before he replied. "No;—I will not," said he. "To say that of any young woman wouldn't be in accord with my ideas."

"Because you can't. It's all gammon. She don't mean to have him, Mr. Newton. You may take my word for that. You go in and ask her if she do. A pretty thing, indeed! I can't invite my friend, Mr. Newton, to eat a bit of dinner, and let him walk out with my Polly, but you must interfere. If you had her to-morrow you wouldn't have a shilling with her."

"I don't want a shilling with her!" said Ontario, still standing upon his legs. "I love her. Will Mr. Newton say as fair as that?"

Mr. Newton found it very difficult to say anything. Even had he been thoroughly intent on the design of making Polly his wife, he could not have brought himself to declare his love aloud, as had just been done by Mr. Moggs. "This is a sort of matter that shouldn't be discussed in public," he said at last.

"Public or private, I love her!" said Ontario Moggs, with his hand on his heart.

Polly herself was certainly badly treated among them. She got no walk that evening, and received no

assurance of undying affection either from one suitor or the other. It became manifest even to Neefit himself that the game could not be played out on this evening. He could not turn Moggs off the premises, because his wife would have interfered. Nor, had he done so, would it have been possible, after such an affair, to induce Polly to stir from the house. She certainly had been badly used among them; and so she took occasion to tell her father when the visitors were both gone. They left the house together at about eight, and Polly at that time had not reappeared. Moggs went to the nearest station of the Midland Railway, and Ralph walked to the Swiss Cottage. Certainly Mr. Neefit's little dinner had been unsuccessful; but Ralph Newton, as he went back to London, was almost disposed to think that Providence had interposed to save him.

"I'll tell you what it is, father," said Polly to her papa, as soon as the two visitors had left the house, "if that's the way you are going to go on, I'll never marry anybody as long as I live."

"My dear, it was all your mother," said Mr. Neefit. "Now wasn't it all your mother? I wish she'd been blowed fust!"

CHAPTER X.

Sir Thomas in his Chambers.

It will be remembered that Sir Thomas Underwood had declined to give his late ward any advice at that interview which took place in Southampton Buildings; or rather that the only advice which he had given to the young man was to cut his throat. The

idle word had left no impression on Ralph Newton;—but still it had been spoken, and was remembered by Sir Thomas. When he was left alone after the young man's departure he was very unhappy. It was not only that he had spoken a word so idle when he ought to have been grave and wise, but that he felt that he had been altogether remiss in his duty as guide, philosopher, and friend. There were old sorrows, too, on this score. In the main Sir Thomas had discharged well a most troublesome, thankless, and profitless duty towards the son of a man who had not been related to him, and with whom an accidental intimacy had been ripened into friendship by letter rather than by social intercourse. Ralph Newton's father had been the younger brother of the present Gregory Newton, of Newton Priory, and had been the parson of the parish of Peele Newton,—as was now Ralph's younger brother, Gregory. The present squire of Newton had never been married, and the property, as has before been said, had been settled on Ralph as the male heir,—provided, of course, that his uncle left no legitimate son of his own. It had come to pass that the two brothers, Gregory and Ralph, had quarrelled about matters of property, and had not spoken for years before the death of the younger. Ralph at this time had been just old enough to be brought into the quarrel. There had been questions of cutting timber and of leases, as to which the parson, acting on his son's behalf, had opposed the Squire with much unnecessary bitterness and suspicion. And it was doubtless the case that the Squire resented bitterly an act done by his own father with the view of perpetuating the property in the true line of the Newtons. For when the settle-

ment was made on the marriage of the younger brother, the elder was already the father of a child, whom he loved none the less because that child's mother had not become his wife. So the quarrel had been fostered, and at the time of the parson's death had extended itself to the young man who was his son, and the heir to the estate. When on his death-bed, the parson had asked Mr. Underwood, who had just then entered the House of Commons, to undertake this guardianship; and the lawyer, with many doubts, had consented. He had striven, but striven in vain, to reconcile the uncle and nephew. And, indeed, he was ill-fitted to accomplish such a task. He could only write letters on the subject, which were very sensible but very cold;—in all of which he would be careful to explain that the steps which had been taken in regard to the property were in strict conformity with the law. The old Squire would have nothing to do with his heir,—in which resolution he was strengthened by the tidings which reached him of his heir's manner of living. He was taught to believe that everything was going to the dogs with the young man, and was wont to say that Newton Priory, with all its acres, would be found to have gone to the dogs too when his day was done; unless, indeed, Ralph should fortunately kill himself by drink or evil living, in which case the property would go to the younger Gregory, the present parson. Now the present parson of Newton was his uncle's friend. Whether that friendship would have been continued had Ralph died and the young clergyman become the heir, may be matter of doubt.

This disagreeable duty of guardianship Sir Thomas had performed with many scruples of conscience, and

a determination to do his best; and he had nearly done it well. But he was a man who could not do it altogether well, let his scruples of conscience be what they might. He had failed in obtaining a father's control over the young man; and even in regard to the property which had passed through his hands,—though he had been careful with it,—he had not been adroit. Even at this moment things had not been settled which should have been settled; and Sir Thomas had felt, when Ralph had spoken of selling all that remained to him and of paying his debts, that there would be fresh trouble, and that he might be forced to own that he had been himself deficient.

And then he told himself,—and did so as soon as Ralph had left him,—that he should have given some counsel to the young man when he came to ask for it. "You had better cut your throat!" In his troubled spirit he had said that, and now his spirit was troubled the more because he had so spoken. He sat for hours thinking of it all. Ralph Newton was the undoubted heir to a very large property. He was now embarrassed,—but all his present debts did not amount to much more than half one year's income of that property which would be his,—probably in about ten years. The Squire might live for twenty years, or might die to-morrow; but his life-interest in the estate, according to the usual calculations, was not worth more than ten years' purchase. Could he, Sir Thomas, have been right to tell a young man, whose prospects were so good, and whose debts, after all, were so light, that he ought to go and cut his throat, as the only way of avoiding a disreputable marriage which would otherwise be forced upon him by the burden of his circum-

stances? Would not a guardian with any true idea of his duty, would not a friend, whose friendship was in any degree real, have found a way out of such difficulties as these?

And then as to the marriage itself,—the proposed marriage with the breeches-maker's daughter,—the more Sir Thomas thought of it the more distasteful did it become to him. He knew that Ralph was unaware of all the evil that would follow such a marriage;—relatives whose every thought and action and word would be distasteful to him; children whose mother would not be a lady, and whose blood would be polluted by an admixture so base;—and, worse still, a life's companion who would be deficient in all those attributes which such a man as Ralph Newton should look for in a wife. Sir Thomas was a man to magnify rather than lessen these evils. And now he allowed his friend,—a man for whose behalf he had bound himself to use all the exercise of friendship,—to go from him with an idea that nothing but suicide could prevent this marriage, simply because there was an amount of debt, which, when compared with the man's prospects, should hardly have been regarded as a burden! As he thought of all this Sir Thomas was very unhappy.

Ralph had left him at about ten o'clock, and he then sat brooding over his misery for about an hour. It was his custom when he remained in his chambers to tell his clerk, Stemm, between nine and ten, that nothing more would be wanted. Then Stemm would go, and Sir Thomas would sleep for a while in his chair. But the old clerk never stirred till thus dismissed. It was now eleven, and Sir Thomas knew very well that Stemm would be in his closet. He

opened the door and called, and Stemm, aroused from his slumbers, slowly crept into the room. "Joseph," said his master, "I want Mr. Ralph's papers."

"To-night, Sir Thomas?"

"Well;—yes, to-night. I ought to have told you when he went away, but I was thinking of things."

"So I was thinking of things," said Stemm, as he very slowly made his way into the other room, and, climbing up a set of steps which stood there, pulled down from an upper shelf a tin box,—and with it a world of dust. "If you'd have said before that they'd be wanted, Sir Thomas, there wouldn't be such a deal of dry muck," said Stemm, as he put down the box on a chair opposite Sir Thomas's knees.

"And now where is the key?" said Sir Thomas. Stemm shook his head very slowly. "You know, Stemm;—where is it?"

"How am I to know, Sir Thomas? I don't know, Sir Thomas. It's like enough in one of those drawers." Then Stemm pointed to a certain table, and after a while slowly followed his own finger. The drawer was unlocked, and under various loose papers there lay four or five loose keys. "Like enough it's one of these," said Stemm.

"Of course you knew where it was," said Sir Thomas.

"I didn't know nothing at all about it," said Stemm, bobbing his head at his master, and making at the same time a gesture with his lips, whereby he intended to signify that his master was making a fool of himself. Stemm was hardly more than five feet high, and was a wizened dry old man, with a very old yellow wig. He delighted in scolding all the world, and his

special delight was in scolding his master. But against all the world he would take his master's part, and had no care in the world except his master's comfort. When Sir Thomas passed an evening at Fulham, Stemm could do as he pleased with himself; but they were blank evenings with Stemm when Sir Thomas was away. While Sir Thomas was in the next room, he always felt that he was in company, but when Sir Thomas was away, all London, which was open to him, offered him no occupation. "That's the key," said Stemm, picking out one; "but it wasn't I as put it there; and you didn't tell me as it was there, and I didn't know it was there. I guessed—just because you do chuck things in there, Sir Thomas."

"What does it matter, Joseph?" said Sir Thomas.

"It does matter when you say I knowed. I didn't know,—nor I couldn't know. There's the key anyhow."

"You can go now, Joseph," said Sir Thomas.

"Good night, Sir Thomas," said Stemm, retiring slowly, "but I didn't know, Sir Thomas,—nor I couldn't know." Then Sir Thomas unlocked the box, and gradually surrounded himself with the papers which he took from it. It was past one o'clock before he again began to think what he had better do to put Ralph Newton on his legs, and to save him from marrying the breeches-maker's daughter. He sat meditating on that and other things as they came into his mind for over an hour, and then he wrote the following letter to old Mr. Newton. Very many years had passed since he had seen Mr. Newton,—so many that the two men would not have known each other had they met; but there had been an occasional corre-

spondence between them, and they were presumed to be on amicable terms with each other.

"Southampton Buildings, 14th July, 186—.

"DEAR SIR,

"I wish to consult you about the affairs of your heir and my late ward, Ralph Newton. Of course I am aware of the unfortunate misunderstanding which has hitherto separated you from him, as to which I believe you will be willing to allow that he, at least, has not been in fault. Though his life has by no means been what his friends could have wished it, he is a fine young fellow; and perhaps his errors have arisen as much from his unfortunate position as from any natural tendency to evil on his own part. He has been brought up to great expectations, with the immediate possession of a small fortune. These together have taught him to think that a profession was unnecessary for him, and he has been debarred from those occupations which generally fall in the way of the heir to a large landed property by the unfortunate fact of his entire separation from the estate which will one day be his. Had he been your son instead of your nephew, I think that his life would have been prosperous and useful.

"As it is, he has got into debt, and I fear that the remains of his own property will not more than suffice to free him from his liabilities. Of course he could raise money on his interest in the Newton estate. Hitherto he has not done so; and I am most anxious to save him from a course so ruinous;—as you will be also, I am sure. He has come to me for advice, and I grieve to say, has formed a project of placing him-

self right again as regards money by offering marriage to the daughter of a retail tradesman. I have reason to believe that hitherto he has not committed himself; but I think that the young woman's father would accept the offer, if made. The money, I do not doubt, would be forthcoming; but the result could not be fortunate. He would then have allied himself with people who are not fit to be his associates, and he would have tied himself to a wife who, whatever may be her merits as a woman, cannot be fit to be the mistress of Newton Priory. But I have not known what advice to give him. I have pointed out to him the miseries of such a match; and I have also told him how surely his prospects for the future would be ruined, were he to attempt to live on money borrowed on the uncertain security of his future inheritance. I have said so much as plainly as I know how to say it;—but I have been unable to point out a third course. I have not ventured to recommend him to make any application to you.

"It seems, however, to me, that I should be remiss in my duty both to him and to you were I not to make you acquainted with his circumstances,—so that you may interfere, should you please to do so, either on his behalf or on behalf of the property. Whatever offence there may have been, I think there can have been none personally from him to yourself. I beg you to believe that I am far from being desirous to dictate to you, or to point out to you this or that as your duty; but I venture to think that you will be obliged to me for giving you information which may lead to the protection of interests which cannot but be dear to you. In conclusion, I will only again say that Ralph himself is clever, well-

conditioned, and, as I most truly believe, a thorough gentleman. Were the intercourse between you that of a father and son, I think you would feel proud of the relationship.

"I remain, dear sir, very faithfully yours,

"THOMAS UNDERWOOD.

"Gregory Newton, Esq., Newton Priory."

This was written on Friday night, and was posted on the Saturday morning by the faithful hand of Joseph Stemm;—who, however, did not hesitate to declare to himself, as he read the address, that his master was a fool for his pains. Stemm had never been favourable to the cause of young Newton, and had considered from the first that Sir Thomas should have declined the trust that had been imposed upon him. What good was to be expected from such a guardianship? And as things had gone on, proving Stemm's prophecies as to young Newton's career to be true, that trusty clerk had not failed to remind his master of his own misgivings. "I told you so," had been repeated by Stemm over and over again, in more phrases than one, until the repetition had made Sir Thomas very angry. Sir Thomas, when he gave the letter to Stemm for posting, said not a word of the contents; but Stemm knew something of old Mr. Gregory Newton and the Newton Priory estate. Stemm, moreover, could put two and two together. "He's a fool for his pains;—that's all," said Stemm, as he poked the letter into the box.

During the whole of the next day the matter troubled Sir Thomas. What if Ralph should go at once to the breeches-maker's daughter,—the thought

of whom made Sir Thomas very sick,—and commit himself before an answer should be received from Mr. Newton? It was only on Sunday that an idea struck him that he might still do something further to avoid the evil;—and with this object he despatched a note to Ralph, imploring him to wait for a few days before he would take any steps towards the desperate remedy of matrimony. Then he begged Ralph to call upon him again on the Wednesday morning. This note Ralph did not get till he went home on the Sunday evening; —at which time, as the reader knows, he had not as yet committed himself to the desperate remedy.

On the following Tuesday Sir Thomas received the following letter from Mr. Newton:—

"Newton Priory, 17th July, 186—.

"DEAR SIR,

"I have received your letter respecting Mr. Ralph Newton's affairs, in regard to which, as far as they concern himself, I am free to say that I do not feel much interest. But you are quite right in your suggestion that my solicitude in respect of the family property is very great. I need not trouble you by pointing out the nature of my solicitude, but may as well at once make an offer to you, which you, as Mr. Ralph Newton's friend, and as an experienced lawyer, can consider,—and communicate to him, if you think right to do so.

"It seems that he will be driven to raise money on his interest in this property. I have always felt that he would do so, and that from the habits of his life the property would be squandered before it came into his possession. Why should he not sell his

reversion, and why should I not buy it? I write in ignorance, but I presume such an arrangement would be legal and honourable on my part. The sum to be given would be named without difficulty by an actuary. I am now fifty-five, and, I believe, in good health. You yourself will probably know within a few thousand pounds what would be the value of the reversion. A proper person would, however, be of course employed.

"I have saved money, but by no means enough for such an outlay as this. I would, however, mortgage the property, or sell one half of it, if by doing so I could redeem the other half from Mr. Ralph Newton.

"You no doubt will understand exactly the nature of my offer, and will let me have an answer. I do not know that I can in any other way expedite Mr. Ralph Newton's course in life.

"I am, dear sir,

"Faithfully yours,

"GREGORY NEWTON, Senior."

When Sir Thomas read this he was almost in greater doubt and difficulty than before. The measure proposed by the elder Newton was no doubt legal and honourable, but it could hardly be so carried out as to be efficacious. Ralph could only sell his share of the inheritance;—or rather his chance of inheriting the estate. Were he to die without a son before his uncle, then his brother would be the heir. The arrangement, however, if practicable, would at once make all things comfortable for Ralph, and would give him, probably, a large unembarrassed revenue,—so large, that the owner of it need certainly have recourse to no dis-

creditable marriage as the means of extricating himself from present calamity. But then Sir Thomas had very strong ideas about a family property. Were Ralph's affairs, indeed, in such disorder as to make it necessary for him to abandon the great prospect of being Newton of Newton? If the breeches-maker's twenty thousand would suffice, surely the thing could be done on cheaper terms than those suggested by the old Squire,—and done without the intervention of Polly Neefit!

CHAPTER XI.

Newton Priory.

NEWTON PRIORY was at this time inhabited by two gentlemen,—old Gregory Newton, who for miles round was known as the Squire; and his son, Ralph Newton, —his son, but not his heir; a son, however, whom he loved as well as though he had been born with an undoubted right to inherit all those dearly-valued acres. A few lines will tell all that need be told of the Squire's early life,—and indeed of his life down to the present period. In very early days, immediately upon his leaving college, he had travelled abroad, and had formed an attachment with a German lady, who by him became the mother of a child. He intended to marry her, hoping to reconcile his father to the match; but before either marriage or reconciliation could take place the young mother, whose babe's life could then only be counted by months, was dead. In the hope that the old man might yield in all things, the infant had been christened Ralph; for the old Squire's name

was Ralph, and there had been a Ralph among the Newtons since Newton Priory had existed. But the old Squire had a Ralph of his own,—the father of our Ralph and of the present parson,—who in his time was rector of Peele Newton; and when the tidings of this foreign baby and of the proposed foreign marriage reached the old Squire,—then he urged his second son to marry, and made the settlement of the estate of which the reader has heard. The settlement was natural enough. It simply entailed the property on the male heir of the family in the second generation. It deprived the eldest son of nothing that would be his in accordance with the usual tenure of English primogeniture. Had he married and become the father of a family, his eldest son would have been the heir. But heretofore there had been no such entails in the Newton family; or, at least, he was pleased to think that there had been none such. And when he himself inherited the property early in life,—before he had reached his thirtieth year,—he thought that his father had injured him. His boy was as dear to him, as though the mother had been his honest wife. Then he endeavoured to come to some terms with his brother. He would do anything in order that his child might be Newton of Newton after him. But the parson would come to no terms at all, and was powerless to make any such terms as those which the elder brother required. The parson was honest, self-denying, and proud on behalf of his own children; but he was intrusive in regard to the property, and apt to claim privileges of interference beyond his right as the guardian of his own or of his children's future interests. And so the brothers had quarrelled;—and so the story

of Newton Priory is told up to the period at which our story begins.

Gregory Newton and his son Ralph had lived together at the Priory for the last six-and-twenty years, and the young man had grown up as a Newton within the knowledge of all the gentry around them. The story of his birth was public, and it was of course understood that he was not the heir. His father had been too wise on the son's behalf to encourage any concealment. The son was very popular, and deserved to be so; but it was known to all the young men round, and also to all the maidens, that he would not be Newton of Newton. There had been no ill-contrived secret, sufficient to make a difficulty, but not sufficient to save the lad from the pains of his position. Everybody knew it; and yet it can hardly be said that he was treated otherwise than he would have been treated had he been the heir. In the hunting-field there was no more popular man. A point had been stretched in his favour, and he was a magistrate. Mothers were kind to him, for it was known that his father loved him well, and that his father had been a prudent man. In all respects he was treated as though he were the heir. He managed the shooting, and was the trusted friend of all the tenants. Doubtless his father was the more indulgent to him because of the injury that had been done to him. After all, his life promised well as to material prosperity; for, though the Squire, in writing to Sir Thomas, had spoken of selling half the property with the view of keeping the other half for his son, he was already possessed of means that would enable him to make the proposed arrangement without such sacrifice as that. For twenty-four years he had

felt that he was bound to make a fortune for his son out of his own income. And he had made a fortune, and mothers knew it, and everybody in the country was very civil to Ralph,—to that Ralph who was not the heir.

But the Squire had never yet quite abandoned the hope that Ralph who was not the heir might yet possess the place; and when he heard of his nephew's doings, heard falsehood as well as truth, from day to day he built up new hopes. He had not expected any such overture as that which had come from Sir Thomas; but if, as he did expect, Ralph the heir should go to the Jews, why should not the Squire purchase the Jews' interest in his own estate? Or, if Ralph the heir should, more wisely, deal with some great money-lending office, why should not he redeem the property through the same? Ralph the heir would surely throw what interest he had into the market, and if so, that interest might be bought by the person to whom it must be of more value than to any other. He had said little about it even to his son;—but he had hoped; and now had come this letter from Sir Thomas. The reader knows the letter and the Squire's answer.

The Squire himself was a very handsome man, tall, broad-shouldered, square-faced, with hair and whiskers almost snow-white already, but which nevertheless gave to him but little sign of age. He was very strong, and could sit in the saddle all day without fatigue. He was given much to farming, and thoroughly understood the duties of a country gentleman. He was hospitable too; for, though money had been saved, the Priory had ever been kept as one of the pleasantest houses in the county. There had been no wife, no

child but the one, and no house in London. The stables, however, had been full of hunters; and it was generally said that no men in Hampshire were better mounted than Gregory the father and Ralph the son. Of the father we will only further say that he was a generous, passionate, persistent, vindictive, and unforgiving man, a bitter enemy and a staunch friend; a thorough-going Tory, who, much as he loved England and Hampshire and Newton Priory, feared that they were all going to the dogs because of Mr. Disraeli and household suffrage; but who felt, in spite of those fears, that to make his son master of Newton Priory after him would be the greatest glory of his life. He had sworn to the young mother on her death-bed that the boy should be to him as though he had been born in wedlock. He had been as good as his word; and we may say that he was one who had at least that virtue, that he was always as good as his word.

The son was very like the father in face and gait and bearing—so like that the parentage was marked to the glance of any observer. He was tall, as was his father, and broad across the chest, and strong and active, as his father had ever been. But his face was of a nobler stamp, bearing a surer impress of intellect, and in that respect telling certainly the truth. This Ralph Newton had been educated abroad, his father, with a morbid feeling which he had since done much to conquer, having feared to send him among other young men, the sons of squires and noblemen, who would have known that their comrade was debarred by the disgrace of his birth from inheriting the property of his father. But it may be doubted whether he had not gained as much as he had lost. German and

French were the same to him as his native tongue; and he returned to the life of an English country gentleman young enough to learn to ride to hounds, and to live as he found others living around him.

Very little was said, or indeed ever had been said, between the father and son as to their relative position in reference to the property. Ralph,—the illegitimate Ralph,—knew well enough and had always known, that the estate was not to be his. He had known this so long that he did not remember the day when he had not known it. Occasionally the Squire would observe with a curse that this or that could not be done with the property,—such a house pulled down, or such another built, this copse grubbed up, or those trees cut down,—because of that reprobate up in London. As to pulling down, there was no probability of interference now, though there had been much of such interference in the life of the old rector. "Ralph," he had once said to his brother the rector, "I'll marry and have a family yet if there is another word about the timber." "I have not the slightest right or even wish to object to your doing so," said the rector; "but as long as things are on their present footing, I shall continue to do my duty." Soon after that it had come to pass that the brothers so quarrelled that all intercourse between them was at an end. Such revenge, such absolute punishment as that which the Squire had threatened, would have been very pleasant to him;—but not even for such pleasure as that would he ruin the boy whom he loved. He did not marry, but saved money, and dreamed of buying up the reversion of his nephew's interest.

His son was just two years older than our Ralph

up in London, and his father was desirous that he should marry. "Your wife would be mistress of the house,—as long as I live, at least," he had once said. "There are difficulties about it," said the son. Of course there were difficulties. "I do not know whether it is not better that I should remain unmarried," he said a few minutes later. "There are men whom marriage does not seem to suit,—I mean as regards their position." The father turned away, and groaned aloud when he was alone. On the evening of that day, as they were sitting together over their wine, the son alluded, not exactly to the same subject, but to the thoughts which had arisen from it within his own mind. "Father," he said, "I don't know whether it wouldn't be better for you to make it up with my cousin, and have him down here."

"What cousin?" said the Squire, turning sharply round.

"With Gregory's eldest brother." The reader will perhaps remember that the Gregory of that day was the parson. "I believe he is a good fellow, and he has done you no harm."

"He has done me all harm."

"No, father; no. We cannot help ourselves, you know. Were he to die, Gregory would be in the same position. It would be better that the family should be kept together."

"I would sooner have the devil here. No consideration on earth shall induce me to allow him to put his foot upon this place. No;—not whilst I live." The son said nothing further, and they sat together in silence for some quarter of an hour,—after which the elder of the two rose from his chair, and, coming

round the table, put his hand on his son's shoulder, and kissed his son's brow. "Father," said the young man, "you think that I am troubled by things which hardly touch me at all." "By God, they touch me close enough!" said the elder. This had taken place some month or two before the date of Sir Thomas's letter; but any reference to the matter of which they were both, no doubt, always thinking was very rare between them.

Newton Priory was a place which a father might well wish to leave unimpaired to his son. It lay in the north of Hampshire, where that county is joined to Berkshire; and perhaps in England there is no prettier district, no country in which moorland and woodland and pasture are more daintily thrown together to please the eye, in which there is a sweeter air, or a more thorough seeming of English wealth and English beauty and English comfort. Those who know Eversley and Bramshill and Heckfield and Strathfieldsaye will acknowledge that it is so. But then how few are the Englishmen who travel to see the beauties of their own country! Newton Priory, or Newton Peele, as the parish was called, lay somewhat west of these places, but was as charming as any of them. The entire parish belonged to Mr. Newton, as did portions of three or four parishes adjoining. The house itself was neither large nor remarkable for its architecture;—but it was comfortable. The rooms indeed were low, for it had been built in the ungainly days of Queen Anne, with additions in the equally ungainly time of George II., and the passages were long and narrow, and the bedrooms were up and down stairs, as though pains had been taken that no

two should be on a level; and the windows were of ugly shape, and the whole mass was uncouth and formless, partaking neither of the Gothic beauty of the Stuart architecture, nor of the palatial grandeur which has sprung up in our days; and it stood low, giving but little view from the windows. But, nevertheless, there was a family comfort and a warm solidity about the house, which endeared it to those who knew it well. There had been a time in which the present Squire had thought of building for himself an entirely new house, on another site,—on the rising brow of a hill, some quarter of a mile away from his present residence; but he had remembered that as he could not leave his estate to his son, it behoved him to spend nothing on the property which duty did not demand from him.

The house stood in a park of some two hundred acres, in which the ground was poor, indeed, but beautifully diversified by rising knolls and little ravines, which seemed to make the space almost unlimited. And then the pines which waved in the Newton woods sighed and moaned with a melody which, in the ears of their owner, was equalled by that of no other fir trees in the world. And the broom was yellower at Newton than elsewhere, and more plentiful; and the heather was sweeter; and wild thyme on the grass more fragrant. So at least Mr. Newton was always ready to swear. And all this he could not leave behind him to his son; but must die with the knowledge, that as soon as the breath was out of his body, it would become the property of a young man whom he hated! He might not cut down the pine woods, nor disturb those venerable single trees which were the

glory of his park;—but there were moments in which he thought that he could take a delight in ploughing up the furze, and in stripping the hill-sides of the heather. Why should his estate be so beautiful for one who was nothing to him? Would it not be well that he should sell everything that was saleable in order that his own son might be the richer?

On the day after he had written his reply to Sir Thomas he was rambling in the evening with his son through the woods. Nothing could be more beautiful than the park was now;—and Ralph had been speaking of the glory of the place. But something had occurred to make his father revert to the condition of a certain tenant, whose holding on the property was by no means satisfactory either to himself or to his landlord. "You know, sir," said the son, "I told you last year that Darvell would have to go."

"Where's he to go to?"

"He'll go to the workhouse if he stays here. It will be much better for him to be bought out while there is still something left for him to sell. Nothing can be worse than a man sticking on to land without a shilling of capital."

"Of course it's bad. His father did very well there."

"His father did very well there till he took to drink and died of it. You know where the road parts Darvell's farm and Brownriggs? Just look at the difference of the crops. There's a place with wheat on each side of you. I was looking at them before dinner."

"Brownriggs is in a different parish. Brownriggs is in Bostock."

"But the land is of the same quality. Of course Walker is a different sort of man from Darvell. I believe there are nearly four hundred acres in Brownriggs."

"All that," said the father.

"And Darvell has about seventy;—but the land should be made to bear the same produce per acre."

The Squire paused a moment, and then asked a question. "What should you say if I proposed to sell Brownriggs?" Now there were two or three matters which made the proposition to sell Brownriggs a very wonderful proposition to come from the Squire. In the first place, he couldn't sell an acre of the property at all,—of which fact his son was very well aware; and then, of all the farms on the estate it was, perhaps, the best and most prosperous. Mr. Walker, the tenant, was a man in very good circumstances, who hunted, and was popular, and was just the man of whose tenancy no landlord would be ashamed.

"Sell Brownriggs!" said the young man. "Well, yes; I should be surprised. Could you sell it?"

"Not at present," said the Squire.

"How could it be sold at all?" They were now standing at a gate leading out of the park into a field held by the Squire in his own hands, and were both leaning on it. "Father," said the son, "I wish you would not trouble yourself about the estate, but let things come and go just as they have been arranged."

"I prefer to arrange them for myself,—if I can. It comes to this, that it may be possible to buy the reversion of the property. I could not buy it all;—or

if I did, must sell a portion of it to raise the money. I have been thinking it over and making calculations. If we let Walker's farm go, and Ingram's, I think I could manage the rest. Of course it would depend on the value of my own life."

There was a long pause, during which they both were still leaning on the gate. "It is a phantom, sir!" the young man said at last.

"What do you mean by a phantom? I don't see any phantom. A reversion can be bought and sold as well as any other property. And if it be sold in this case, I am as free to buy it as any other man."

"Who says it is to be sold, sir?"

"I say so. That prig of a barrister, Sir Thomas Underwood, has already made overtures to me to do something for that young scoundrel in London. He is a scoundrel, for he is spending money that is not his own. And he is now about to make a marriage that will disgrace his family." The Squire probably did not at the moment think of the disgrace which he had brought upon the family by not marrying. "The fact is, that he will have to sell all that he can sell. Why should I not buy it!"

"If he were to die?" suggested the son.

"I wish he would," said the father.

"Don't say that, sir. But if he were to die, Gregory here, who is as good a fellow as ever lived, would come into his shoes. Ralph could sell no more than his own chance."

"We could get Gregory to join us," said the energetic Squire. "He, also, could sell his right."

"You had better leave it as it is, sir," said the

son, after another pause. "I feel sure that you will only get yourself into trouble. The place is yours as long as you live, and you should enjoy it."

"And know that it is going to the Jews after me! Not if I can help it. You won't marry, as things are; but you'd marry quick enough if you knew you would remain here after my death;—if you were sure that a child of yours could inherit the estate. I mean to try it on, and it is best that you should know. Whatever he can make over to the Jews he can make over to me;—and as that is what he is about, I shall keep my eyes open. I shall go up to London about it, and see Carey next week. A man can do a deal if he sets himself thoroughly to work."

"I'd leave it alone if I were you," said the young man.

"I shall not leave it alone. I mayn't be able to get it all, but I'll do my best to secure a part of it. If any is to go, it had better be the land in Bostock and Twining. I think we could manage to keep Newton entire."

His mind was always on the subject, though it was not often that he said a word about it to the son in whose behalf he was so anxious. His thoughts were always dwelling on it, so that the whole peace and comfort of his life were disturbed. A life-interest in a property is, perhaps, as much as a man desires to have when he for whose protection he is debarred from further privileges of ownership is a well-loved son;—but an entail that limits an owner's rights on behalf of an heir who is not loved, who is looked upon as an enemy, is very grievous. And in this case the man who was so limited, so cramped, so hedged

in, and robbed of the true pleasures of ownership, had a son with whom he would have been willing to share everything,—whom it would have been his delight to consult as to every roof to be built, every tree to be cut, every lease to be granted or denied. He would dream of telling his son, with a certain luxury of self-abnegation, that this or that question as to the estate should be settled in the interest, not of the setting, but of the rising sun. "It is your affair rather than mine, my boy;—do as you like." He could picture to himself in his imagination a pleasant, half-mock melancholy in saying such things, and in sharing the reins of government between his own hands and those of his heir. As the sun is falling in the heavens and the evening lights come on, this world's wealth and prosperity afford no pleasure equal to this. It is this delight that enables a man to feel, up to the last moment, that the goods of the world are good. But of all this he was to be robbed,—in spite of all his prudence. It might perhaps sometimes occur to him that he by his own vice had brought this scourge upon his back;—but not the less on that account did it cause him to rebel against the rod. Then there would come upon him the idea that he might cure this evil were his energy sufficient;—and all that he heard of that nephew and heir, whom he hated, tended to make him think that the cure was within his reach. There had been moments in which he had planned a scheme of leading on that reprobate into quicker and deeper destruction, of a pretended friendship with the spendthrift, in order that money for speedier ruin might be lent on that security which the uncle himself was so anxious to possess as his very own. But the

scheme of this iniquity, though it had been planned and mapped out in his brain, had never been entertained as a thing really to be done. There are few of us who have not allowed our thoughts to work on this or that villany, arranging the method of its performance, though the performance itself is far enough from our purpose. The amusement is not without its danger,—and to the Squire of Newton had so far been injurious that it had tended to foster his hatred. He would, however, do nothing that was dishonest,—nothing that the world would condemn,—nothing that would not bear the light. The argument to which he mainly trusted was this,—that if Ralph Newton, the heir, had anything to sell and was pleased to sell it, it was as open to him to buy it as to any other. If the reversion of the estate of Newton Priory was in the market, why should he not buy it?—the reversion or any part of the reversion? If such were the case he certainly would buy it.

CHAPTER XII.

Mrs. Brownlow.

THERE was a certain old Mrs. Brownlow, who inhabited a large old-fashioned house on the Fulham Road, just beyond the fashionable confines of Brompton, but nearer to town than the decidedly rural district of Walham Green and Parson's Green. She was deeply interested in the welfare of the Underwood girls, having been a first cousin of their paternal grandmother, and was very unhappy because their father would not go home and take care of them. She was an excellent old woman, affectionate, charitable, and

religious; but she was rather behindhand in general matters, and did not clearly understand much about anything in these latter days. She had heard that Sir Thomas was accustomed to live away from his daughters, and thought it very shocking;—but she knew that Sir Thomas either was or had been in Parliament, and that he was a great lawyer and a very clever man, and therefore she made excuses. She did not quite understand it all, but she thought it expedient to befriend the young ladies. She had heard, too, that Ralph Newton, who had been entrusted to the care of Sir Thomas, was heir to an enormous property; and she thought that the young man ought to marry one of the young ladies. Consequently, whenever she would ask her cousins to tea, she would also ask Mr. Ralph Newton. Sometimes he would come. More frequently he would express his deep regret that a previous engagement prevented him from having the pleasure of accepting Mrs. Brownlow's kind invitation. On all these occasions Mrs. Brownlow invited Sir Thomas;—but Sir Thomas never came. It could hardly have been expected of him that he should do so. Bolsover House was the old-fashioned name of Mrs. Brownlow's residence; and an invitation for tea had been sent for a certain Tuesday in July,—Tuesday, July the 18th. Mrs. Brownlow had of course been informed of the arrival of Mary Bonner,—who was in truth as nearly related to her as the Underwood girls,—and the invitation was given with the express intention of doing honour to Mary. By the young ladies from Popham Villa the invitation was accepted as a matter of course.

"Will he be there?" Clary said to her sister.

"I hope not, Clarissa."

"Why do you hope not? We are not to quarrel; are we, Patty?"

"No;—we need not quarrel. But I am afraid of him. He is not good enough, Clary, for you to be unhappy about him. And I fear,—I fear, he is——"

"Is what, Patty? Do speak it out. There is nothing I hate so much as a mystery."

"I fear he is not genuine;—what people call honest. He would say things without quite meaning what he says."

"I don't think it. I am sure he is not like that. I may have been a fool——" Then she stopped herself, remembering the whole scene on the lawn. Alas;—there had been no misunderstanding him. The crime had been forgiven; but the crime had been a great fact. Since that she had seen him only once, and then he had been so cold! But yet as he left her he had not been quite cold. Surely that pressure of her hand had meant something; had meant something after that great crime! But why did he not come to her; or why,—which would have been so far, far better,—did he not go to her papa and tell everything to him? Now, however, there was the chance that she would see him at Bolsover House. That Mrs. Brownlow would ask him was quite a matter of course.

The great event of the evening was to be the introduction of Mrs. Brownlow to the new cousin. They were to drink tea out in the old-fashioned garden behind the house, from which Mrs. Brownlow could retreat into her own room at the first touch of a breath of air. The day was one of which the world at large would declare that there was no breath of air, morning, noon, or night. There was to be quite a party.

That was evident from the first to our young ladies, who knew the ways of the house, and who saw that the maids were very smart, and that an extra young woman had been brought in; but they were the first to come,—as was proper.

"My dear Mary," said the old woman to her new guest, "I am glad to see you. I knew your mother and loved her well. I hope you will be happy, my dear." Mrs. Brownlow was a very little old woman, very pretty, very grey, very nicely dressed, and just a little deaf. Mary Bonner kissed her, and murmured some word of thanks. The old woman stood for a few seconds, looking at the beauty,—astounded like the rest of the world. "Somebody told me she was good-looking," Mrs. Brownlow said to Patience;—"but I did not expect to see her like that."

"Is she not lovely?"

"She is a miracle, my dear! I hope she won't steal all the nice young men away from you and your sister, eh? Yes;—yes. What does Mr. Newton say to her?" Patience, however, knew that she need not answer all the questions which Mrs. Brownlow asked, and she left this question unanswered.

Two or three elderly ladies came in, and four or five young ladies, and an old gentleman who sat close to Mrs. Brownlow and squeezed her hand very often, and a middle-aged gentleman who was exceedingly funny, and two young gentlemen who carried the tea and cakes about, but did not talk much. Such were the guests, and the young ladies, who no doubt were accustomed to Mrs. Brownlow's parties, took it all as it was intended, and were not discontented. There was one young lady, however, who longed to ask a

question, but durst not. Had Ralph Newton promised that he would come? Clary was sitting between the old gentleman who seemed to be so fond of Mrs. Brownlow's hand and her cousin Mary. She said not a word,—nor, indeed, was there much talking among the guests in general. The merry, middle-aged gentleman did the talking, combining with it a good deal of exhilarating laughter at his own wit. The ladies sat round, and sipped their tea and smiled. That middle-aged gentleman certainly earned his mild refreshment; —for the party without him must have been very dull. Then there came a breath of air,—or, as Mrs. Brownlow called it, a keen north wind; and the old lady retreated into the house. "Don't let me take anybody else in,—only I can't stand a wind like that." The old gentleman accompanied her, and then the elderly ladies. The young ladies came next, and the man of wit, with the silent young gentlemen, followed, laden with scarfs, parasols, fans, and stray teacups. "I don't think we used to have such cold winds in July," said Mrs. Brownlow. The old gentleman pressed her hand once more, and whispered into her ear that there had certainly been a great change.

Suddenly Ralph Newton was among them. Clarissa had not heard him announced, and to her it seemed as though he had come down from the heavens, —as would have befitted his godship. He was a great favourite with Mrs. Brownlow, who, having heard that he was heir to a very large property, thought that his extravagance became him. According to her views it was his duty to spend a good deal of money, and his duty also to marry Clarissa Underwood. As he was as yet unmarried to any one else, she hardly doubted

that he would do his duty. She was a sanguine old lady, who always believed that things would go right. She bustled and fussed on the present occasion with the very evident intention of getting a seat for him next to Clarissa; but Clarissa was as active in avoiding such an arrangement, and Ralph soon found himself placed between Mary Bonner and a very deaf old lady, who was always present at Mrs. Brownlow's tea-parties. "I suppose this has all been got up in your honour," he said to Mary. She smiled, and shook her head. "Oh, but it has. I know the dear old lady's ways so well! She would never allow a new Underwood to be at the villa for a month without having a tea-party to consecrate the event."

"Isn't she charming, Mr. Newton;—and so pretty?"

"No end of charming, and awfully pretty. Why are we all in here instead of out in the garden?"

"Mrs. Brownlow thought that it was cold."

"With the thermometer at 80⁰! What do you think, who ought to know what hot weather means? Are you chilly?"

"Not in the least. We West Indians never find this climate cold the first year. Next year I don't doubt that I shall be full of rheumatism all over, and begging to be taken back to the islands."

Clarissa watched them from over the way as though every word spoken between them had been a treason to herself. And yet she had almost been rude to old Mrs. Brownlow in the manner in which she had placed herself on one side of the circle when the old lady had begged her to sit on the other. Certainly, had she heard all that was said between her lover and her cousin, there was nothing in the words to offend her.

She did not hear them; but she could see that Ralph looked into Mary's beautiful face, and that Mary smiled in a demure, silent, self-assured way, which was already becoming odious to Clarissa. Clarissa herself, when Ralph looked into her face, would blush and turn away, and feel herself unable to bear the gaze of the god.

In a few minutes there came to be a sudden move, and all the young people trooped back into the garden. It was Ralph Newton who did it, and nobody quite understood how it was done. "Certainly, my dears; certainly," said the old lady. "I daresay the moon is very beautiful. Yes; I see Mr. Ralph. You are not going to take me out, I can tell you. The moon is all very well, but I like to see it through the window. Don't mind me. Mr. Truepeny will stay with me." Mr. Truepeny, who was turned eighty, put out his hand and patted Mrs. Brownlow's arm, and assured her that he wanted nothing better than to stay with her for ever. The witty gentleman did not like the move, because it had been brought about by a new-comer, who had, as it were, taken the wind out of his sails. He lingered awhile, hoping to have weight enough to control the multitude;—in which he failed, and at last made one of the followers. And Clarissa lingered also, because Ralph had been the first to stir. Ralph had gone out with Mary Bonner, and therefore Clarissa had held back. So it came to pass that she found herself walking round the garden with the witty, exhilarating, middle-aged gentleman,—whom, for the present at least, she most cordially hated. "I am not quite sure that our dear old friend isn't right," said the witty man, whose name was Poojean;—"a chair

to sit down upon, and a wall or two around one, and a few little nick-nacks about,—carpets and tables and those sort of things,—are comfortable at times."

"I wonder you should leave them then," said Clarissa.

"Can there be a wonder that I leave them with such temptation as this," said the gallant Poojean. Clarissa hated him worse than ever, and would not look at him, or even make the faintest sign that she heard him. The voice of Ralph Newton through the trees struck her ears; and yet the voice wasn't loud,—as it would not be if it were addressed with tenderness to Mary. And there was she bound by some indissoluble knot to,—Mr. Poojean. "That Mr. Newton is a friend of yours?" asked Mr. Poojean.

"Yes;—a friend of ours," said Clarissa.

"Then I will express my intense admiration for his wit, general character, and personal appearance. Had he been a stranger to you, I should, of course, have insinuated an opinion that he was a fool, a coxcomb, and the very plainest young man I had ever seen. That is the way of the world,—isn't it, Miss Underwood?"

"I don't know," said Clarissa.

"Oh, yes,—you do. That's the way we all go on. As he is your friend, I can't dare to begin to abuse him till after the third time round the garden."

"I beg, then, that there may be only two turns," said Clarissa. But she did not know how to stop, or to get rid of her abominable companion.

"If I mustn't abuse him after three turns, he must be a favourite," said the persevering Poojean. "I suppose he is a favourite. By-the-bye, what a lovely

girl that is with whom your favourite was,—shall I say flirting?"

"That lady is my cousin, Mr. Poojean."

"I didn't say that she was flirting, mind. I wouldn't hint such a thing of any young lady, let her be anybody's cousin. Young ladies never flirt. But young men do sometimes;—don't they? After all, it is the best fun going;—isn't it?"

"I don't know," said Clarissa. By this time they had got round to the steps leading from the garden to the house. "I think I'll go in, Mr. Poojean." She did go in, and Mr. Poojean was left looking at the moon all alone, as though he had separated himself from all mirth and society for that melancholy but pleasing occupation. He stood there gazing upwards with his thumbs beneath his waistcoat. "Grand,—is it not?" he said to the first couple that passed him.

"Awfully grand, and beautifully soft, and all the rest of it," said Ralph, as he went on with Mary Bonner by his side.

"That fellow has got no touch of poetry in him!" said Poojean to himself. In the meantime Clarissa, pausing a moment as she entered through the open window, heard Ralph's cheery voice. How well she knew its tones! And she still paused, with ears erect, striving to catch some word from her cousin's mouth. But Mary's words, if they were words spoken by her, were too low and soft to be caught. "Oh,—if she should turn out to be sly!" Clarissa said to herself. Was it true that Ralph had been flirting with her,—as that odious man had said? And why, why, why had Ralph not come to her, if he really loved her, as he had twice told her that he did? Of course she had

not thrown herself into his arms when old Mrs. Brownlow made that foolish fuss. But still he might have come to her. He might have waited for her in the garden. He might have saved her from the "odious vulgarity" of that "abominable old wretch." For in such language did Clarissa describe to herself the exertions to amuse her which had been made by her late companion. But had the Sydney Smith of the day been talking to her, he would have been dull, or the Count D'Orsay of the day, he would have been vulgar, while the sound of Ralph Newton's voice, as he walked with another girl, was reaching her ears. And then, before she had seated herself in Mrs. Brownlow's drawing-room, another idea had struck her. Could it be that Ralph did not come to her because she had told him that she would never forgive him for that crime? Was it possible that his own shame was so great that he was afraid of her? If so, could she not let him know that he was,—well, forgiven? Poor Clarissa! In the meantime the voices still came to her from the garden, and she still thought that she could distinguish Ralph's low murmurings.

It may be feared that Ralph had no such deep sense of his fault as that suggested. He did remember well enough,—had reflected more than once or twice,—on those words which he had spoken to Clary. Having spoken them he had felt his crime to be their not unnatural accompaniment. At that moment, when he was on the lawn at Fulham, he had thought that it would be very sweet to devote himself to dear Clary,—that Clary was the best and prettiest girl he knew, that, in short, it might be well for him to love

her and cherish her, and make her his wife. Had not Patience come upon the scene, and disturbed them, he would probably then and there have offered to her his hand and heart. But Patience had come upon the scene, and the offer had not been, as he thought, made. Since all that, which had passed ages ago,—weeks and weeks ago,—there had fallen upon him the prosaic romance of Polly Neefit. He had actually gone down to Hendon to offer himself as a husband to the breeches-maker's daughter. It is true he had hitherto escaped in that quarter also,—or, at any rate, had not as yet committed himself. But the train of incidents and thoughts which had induced him to think seriously of marrying Polly, had made him aware that he could not propose marriage to Sir Thomas Underwood's daughter. From such delight as that he found, on calm reflection, that he had debarred himself by the folly of his past life. It was well that Patience had come upon the scene.

Such being the state of affairs with him, that little episode with Clary being at an end,—or rather, as he thought, never having quite come to a beginning,—and his little arrangement as to Polly Neefit being in abeyance, he was free to amuse himself with this newcomer. Miss Bonner was certainly the most lovely girl he had ever seen. He could imagine no beauty to exceed hers. He knew well enough that her loveliness could be nothing to him;—but a woman's beauty is in one sense as free as the air in all Christian countries. It is a light shed for the delight, not of one, but of many. There could be no reason why he should not be among the admirers of Miss Bonner. "I expect, you know, to be admitted quite on the

terms of an old friend," he said. "I shall call you Mary, and all that kind of thing."

"I don't see your claim," said Miss Bonner.

"Oh, yes, you do,—and must allow it. I was almost a sort of son of Sir Thomas's,—till he turned me off when I came of age. And Patience and Clarissa are just the same as sisters to me."

"You are not even a cousin, Mr. Newton."

"No;—I'm not a cousin. It's more like a foster-brother, you know. Of course I shan't call you Mary if you tell me not. How is it to be?"

"Just for the present I'll be Miss Bonner."

"For a week or so?"

"Say for a couple of years, and then we'll see how it is."

"You'll be some lucky fellow's wife long before that. Do you like living at Fulham?"

"Very much. How should I not like it? They are so kind to me. And you know, when I first resolved to come home, I thought I should have to go out as a governess,—or, perhaps, as a nursery-maid, if they didn't think me clever enough to teach. I did not expect my uncle to be so good to me. I had never seen him, you know. Is it not odd that my uncle is so little at home?"

"It is odd. He is writing a book, you see, and he finds that the air of Fulham doesn't suit his brains."

"Oh, Mr. Newton!"

"And he likes to be quite alone. There isn't a better fellow going than your uncle. I am sure I ought to say so. But he isn't just what I call,—sociable."

"I think him almost perfection;—but I do wish he

was more at home for their sakes. We'll go in now, Mr. Newton. Patience has gone in, and I haven't seen Clarissa for ever so long."

Soon after this the guests began to go away. Mr. Truepeny gave Mrs. Brownlow's hand the last squeeze, and Mr. Poojean remarked that all terrestrial joys must have an end. "Not but that such hours as these," said he, "have about them a dash of the celestial which almost gives them a claim to eternity." "Horrible fool!" said Clarissa to her sister, who was standing close to her.

"Mrs. Brownlow would, perhaps, prefer going to bed," said Ralph. Then every one was gone except the Underwoods and Ralph Newton. The girls had on their hats and shawls, and all was prepared for their departure;—but there was some difficulty about the fly. The Fulham fly which had brought them, and which always took them everywhere, had hitherto omitted to return for them. It was ordered for half-past ten, and now it was eleven. "Are you sure he was told?" said Clary. Patience had told him herself, —twice. "Then he must be tipsy again," said Clary. Mrs. Brownlow bade them to sit still and wait; but when the fly did not arrive by half-past eleven, it was necessary that something should be done. There were omnibuses on the road, but they might probably be full. "It is only two miles,—let us walk," said Clary; and so it was decided.

Ralph insisted on walking with them till he should meet an omnibus or a cab to take him back to London. Patience did her best to save him from such labour, protesting that they would want no such escort. But he would not be gainsayed, and would go with them

at least a part of the way. Of course he did not leave them till they had reached the gate of Popham Villa. But when they were starting there arose a difficulty as to the order in which they would marshal themselves; a difficulty as to which not a word could be spoken, but which was not the less a difficulty. Clarissa hung back. Ralph had spoken hardly a word to her all the evening. It had better continue so. She was sure that he could not care for her. But she thought that she would be better contented that he should walk with Patience than with Mary Bonner. But Mary took the matter into her own hands, and started off boldly with Patience. Patience hardly approved, but there would be nothing so bad as seeming to disapprove. Clary's heart was in her mouth as she found her arm within his. He had contrived that it should be so, and she could not refuse. Her mind was changed again now, and once more she wished that she could let him know that the crime was forgiven.

"I am so glad to have a word with you at last," he said. "How do you get on with the new cousin?"

"Very well;—and how have you got on with her?"

"You must ask her that. She is very beautiful,—what I call wonderfully beautiful."

"Indeed she is," said Clary, withdrawing almost altogether the weight of her hand from his arm.

"And clever, too,—very clever; but——"

"But what?" asked Clary, and the softest, gentlest half-ounce of pressure was restored.

"Well;—nothing. I like her uncommonly; but is she not quite,—quite,—quite——"

"She is quite everything that she ought to be, Ralph."

"I'm sure of that;—an angel, you know, and all the rest of it. But angels are cold, you know. I don't know that I ever admired a girl so much in my life." The pressure was again lessened,—all but annihilated. "But, somehow, I should never dream of falling in love with your cousin."

"Perhaps you may do so without dreaming," said Clary, as unconsciously she gave back the weight to her hand.

"No;—I know very well the sort of girl that makes me spoony." This was not very encouraging to poor Clary, but still she presumed that he meant to imply that she herself was a girl of the sort that so acted upon him. And the conversation went on in this way throughout the walk. There was not much encouragement to her, and certainly she did not say a word to him that could make him feel that she wanted encouragement. But still he had been with her, and she had been happy: and when they parted at the gate, and he again pressed her hand, she thought that things had gone well. "He must know that I have forgiven him now!" she said to herself.

CHAPTER XIII.

Mr. Neefit is disturbed.

On the morning following Mrs. Brownlow's little tea-party Ralph Newton was bound by appointment to call upon Sir Thomas. But before he started on that duty a certain friend of his called upon him. This friend was Mr. Neefit. But before the necessary account

of Mr. Neefit's mission is given, the reader must be made acquainted with a few circumstances as they had occurred at Hendon.

It will be remembered perhaps that on the Sunday evening the two rivals left the cottage at the same moment, one taking the road to the right, and the other that to the left,—so that bloodshed, for that occasion at least, was prevented. "Neefit," said his wife to him when they were alone together, "you'll be getting yourself into trouble." "You be blowed," said Neefit. He was very angry with his wife, and was considering what steps he would take to maintain his proper marital and parental authority. He was not going to give way to the weaker vessel in a matter of such paramount importance as to be made a fool of in his own family. He was quite sure of this, while the strength of the port-wine still stood to him; and though he was somewhat more troubled in spirit when his wife began to bully him on the next morning, he still had valour enough to say that Ontario Moggs also might be—blowed.

On the Monday, when he returned home and asked for Polly, he found that Polly was out walking. Mrs. Neefit did not at once tell him that Moggs was walking with her, but such was the fact. Just at five o'clock Moggs had presented himself at the cottage,—knowing very well, sly dog that he was, the breeches-maker's hour of return, which took place always precisely at four minutes past six,—and boldly demanded an interview with Polly. "I should like to hear what she's got to say to me," said he, looking boldly, almost savagely, into Mrs. Neefit's face. According to that matron's ideas this was the proper way in which maidens

should be wooed and won; and, though Polly had at first declared that she had nothing at all to say to Mr. Moggs, she allowed herself at last to be led forth. Till they had passed the railway station on the road leading away from London, Ontario said not a word of his purpose. Polly feeling that silence was awkward, and finding that she was being hurried along at a tremendous pace, spoke of the weather and of the heat, and expostulated. "It is hot, very hot," said Ontario, taking off his hat and wiping his brow,—"but there are moments in a man's life when he can't go slow."

"Then there are moments in his life when he must go on by himself," said Polly. But her pluck was too good for her to desert him at such a moment, and, although he hardly moderated his pace till he had passed the railway station, she kept by his side. As things had gone so far it might be quite as well now that she should hear what he had to say. A dim, hazy idea had crossed the mind of Moggs that it would be as well that he should get out into the country before he began his task, and that the line of the railway which passed beneath the road about a quarter of a mile beyond Mr. Neefit's cottage, might be considered as the boundary which divided the town from pastoral joys. He waited, therefore, till the bridge was behind them, till they had passed the station, which was close to the bridge;—and then he began.

"Polly," said he, "you know what brings me here."

Polly did know very well, but she was not bound to confess such knowledge. "You've brought me here, Mr. Moggs, and that's all I know," she said.

"Yes;—I've brought you here. Polly, what took

place last night made me very unhappy,—very unhappy indeed."

"I can't help that, Mr. Moggs."

"Not that I mean to blame you."

"Blame me! I should think not. Blame me, indeed! Why are you to blame anybody because father chooses to ask whom he pleases to dinner? A pretty thing indeed, if father isn't to have whom he likes in his own house."

"Polly, you know what I mean."

"I know you made a great goose of yourself last night, and I didn't feel a bit obliged to you."

"No, I didn't. I wasn't a goose at all. I don't say but what I'm as big a fool as most men. I don't mean to stick up for myself. I know well enough that I am foolish often. But I wasn't foolish last night. What was he there for?"

"What business have you to ask, Mr. Moggs?"

"All the business in life. Love;—real love. That's why I have business. That young man, who is, I suppose what you call a swell."

"Don't put words into my mouth, Mr. Moggs. I don't call him anything of the kind."

"He's a gentleman."

"Yes;—he is a gentleman,—I suppose."

"And I'm a tradesman,—a bootmaker."

"So is father a tradesman, and if you mean to tell me that I turn up my nose at people the same as father is, you may just go back to London and think what you like about me. I won't put up with it from you or anybody. A tradesman to me is as good as anybody,—if he is as good. There."

"Oh, Polly, you do look so beautiful!"

"Bother!"

"When you say that, and speak in that way, I think you as good as you are beautiful."

"Remember,—I don't say a word against what you call——gentlemen. I take 'em just as they come. Mr. Newton is a very nice young man."

"Are you going to take him, Polly?"

"How can I take him when he has never asked me? You are not my father, Mr. Moggs, nor yet my uncle. What right have you to question me? If I was going to take him, I shouldn't want your leave."

"Polly, you ought to be honest."

"I am honest."

"Will you hear me, Polly?"

"No, I won't."

"You won't! Is that answer to go for always?"

"Yes, it is. You come and tease and say uncivil things, and I don't choose to be bullied. What right have you to talk to me about Mr. Newton? Did I ever give you any right? Honest indeed! What right have you to talk to me about being honest?"

"It's all true, dear."

"Very well, then. Hold your tongue and don't say such things. Honest indeed! If I were to take the young man to-morrow, that would not make me dishonest."

"It's all true, dear, and I beg your pardon. If I have offended you, I will beg your pardon."

"Never mind about that;—only don't say foolish things."

"Is it foolish, Polly, to say that I love you? And if I love you, can I like to see a young fellow like Mr. Newton hanging about after you? He doesn't love

you. He can't love you,—as I do. Your father brings him here because he is a gentleman."

"I don't think anything of his being a gentleman."

"But think of me. Of course I was unhappy, wretched,—miserable. I knew why he was there. You can understand, Polly, that when a man really loves he must be the miserablest or the happiest of human beings."

"I don't understand anything about it."

"I wish you would let me teach you."

"I don't want to learn, and I doubt whether you'd make a good master. I really must go back now, Mr. Moggs. I came out because mother said I'd better. I don't know that it could do any good if we were to walk on to Edgeware." And so saying, Polly turned back.

He walked beside her half the way home in silence, thinking that if he could only choose the proper words and the proper tone he might yet prevail; but feeling that the proper words and the proper tone were altogether out of his reach. On those favourite subjects, the ballot, or the power of strikes, he could always find the proper words and the proper tone when he rose upon his legs at the Cheshire Cheese;—and yet, much as he loved the ballot, he loved Polly Neefit infinitely more dearly. When at the Cheshire Cheese he was a man; but now, walking with the girl of his heart, he felt himself to be a bootmaker, and the smell of the leather depressed him. It was evident that she would walk the whole way home in silence, if he would permit it. The railway station was already again in sight, when he stopped her on the pathway, and

made one more attempt. "You believe me, when I say that I love you?"

"I don't know, Mr. Moggs."

"Oh, Polly, you don't know!"

"But it doesn't signify,—not the least. I ain't bound to take a man because he loves me."

"You won't take Mr. Newton;—will you?"

"I don't know. I won't say anything about it. Mr. Newton is nothing to you." Then there was a pause. "If you think, Mr. Moggs, that you can recommend yourself to a young woman by such tantrums as there were going on last night, you are very much mistaken. That's not the way to win me."

"I wish I knew which was the way."

"Mr. Newton never said a word."

"Your father told him to take you out a-walking before my very eyes! Was I to bear that? Think of it, Polly. You mayn't care for me, and I don't suppose you do; but you may understand what my feelings were. What would you have thought of me if I'd stayed there, smoking, and borne it quiet,—and you going about with that young man? I'll tell you what it is, Polly, I couldn't bear it, and I won't. There;—and now you know what I mean." At this point in his speech he took off his hat and waved it in the air. "I won't bear it. There are things a man can't bear,—can't bear,—can't bear. Oh, Polly! if you could only be brought to understand what it is that I feel!"

After all, he didn't do it so very badly. There was just a tear in the corner of Polly's eye, though Polly was very careful that he shouldn't see it. And

Polly did know well enough that he was in earnest,—that he was, in fact, true. But then he was gawky and ungainly. It was not that he was a shoemaker. Could he have had his own wits, and danced like the gasfitter, he might have won her still, against Ralph Newton, with all his blood and white hands. But poor Ontario was, as regarded externals, so ill a subject for a great passion!

"And where have you been, Polly?" said her father, as soon as she entered the house.

"I have been walking with Ontario Moggs," said Polly boldly.

"What have you been saying to him? I won't have you walk with Ontario Moggs. I and your mother 'll have to fall out if this kind of thing goes on."

"Don't be silly, father."

"What do you mean by that, miss?"

"It is silly. Why shouldn't I walk with him? Haven't I known him all my life, and walked with him scores of times. Isn't it silly, father? Don't I know that if I told you I loved Ontario Moggs, you'd let me marry him to-morrow?"

"He'd have to take you in what you stand up in."

"He wouldn't desire anything better. I'll say that for him. He's true and honest. I'd love him if I could,—only, somehow I don't."

"You've told him you didn't,—once and for all?"

"I don't know about that, father. He'll come again, you may be sure. He's one of that sort that isn't easily said nay to. If you mean,—have I said

yes?—I haven't. I'll never say yes to any man unless I love him. When I do say it I shall mean it,—whether it's Onty Moggs or anybody else. I'm not going to be given away, you know, like a birthday present, out of a shop. There's nobody can give me away, father,—only myself." To all which utterances of a rebellious spirit the breeches-maker made no answer. He knew that Polly would, at least, be true to him; and, as she was as yet free, the field was still open to his candidate. He believed thoroughly that had not his wife interfered, and asked the bootmaker to join that unfortunate dinner party, his daughter and Ralph Newton would now have been engaged together. And probably it might have been so. When first it had been whispered to Polly that that handsome and very agreeable young gentleman, Mr. Ralph Newton, might become a suitor for her hand, she had chucked up her head and declared to her mother that she didn't intend to take a husband of her father's choosing; but as she came to know Ralph a little, she did find that he was good-looking and agreeable,—and her heart did flutter at the idea of becoming the wife of a real, undoubted gentleman. She meant to have her grand passion, and she must be quite sure that Mr. Newton loved her. But she didn't see any reason why Mr. Newton shouldn't love her, and upon the whole, she was inclined to obey her father rather than to disobey him. And it might still be that he should win her; for he had done nothing to disgrace himself in her sight. But there did lurk within her bosom some dim idea that he should have bestirred himself more thoroughly on that Sunday evening, and not have allowed himself to be driven out of the field by

Ontario Moggs. She wronged him there, as indeed he had had no alternative, unless he had followed her up to her bedroom.

Mr. Neefit, when he found that no harm had as yet been done, resolved that he would return to the charge. It has been before observed that he lacked something in delicacy, but what he did so lack he made up in persistency. He had been unable to impute any blame to Ralph as to that evening. He felt that he rather owed an apology to his favourite candidate. He would make the apology, and inform the favourite candidate, at the same time, that the course was still open to him. With these views he left Conduit Street early on the Wednesday morning, and called on Ralph at his rooms. "Mr. Newton," he said, hastening at once upon the grand subject, "I hope you didn't think as I was to blame in having Moggs at our little dinner on Sunday." Ralph declared that he had never thought of imputing blame to any one. "But it was,—as awk'ard as awk'ard could be. It was my wife's doing. Of course you can see how it all is. That chap has been hankering after Polly ever since she was in her teens. But, Lord love you, Captain, he ain't a chance with her. He was there again o' Monday, but the girl wouldn't have a word to say to him." Ralph sat silent, and very grave. He was taken now somewhat by surprise, having felt, up to this moment, that he would at least have the advantage of a further interview with Sir Thomas, before he need say another word to Mr. Neefit. "What I want you to do, Captain, is just to pop it, straight off, to my girl. I know she'd take you, because of her way of looking. Not, mind, that she

ever said so. Oh, no. But the way to find out is just to ask the question."

"You see, Mr. Neefit, it wasn't very easy to ask it last Sunday," said Ralph, attempting to laugh.

"Moggs has been at her again," said Neefit. This argument was good. Had Ralph been as anxious as Moggs, he would have made his opportunity.

"And, to tell you the truth, Mr. Neefit——"

"Well, sir?"

"There is nothing so disagreeable as interfering in families. I admire your daughter amazingly."

"She's a trump, Mr. Newton."

"She is indeed;—and I thoroughly appreciate the great generosity of your offer."

"I'll be as good as my word, Mr. Newton. The money shall be all there,—down on the nail."

"But, you see, your wife is against me."

"Blow my wife. You don't think Polly 'd do what her mother tells her? Who's got the money-bag? That's the question. You go down and pop it straight. You ain't afraid of an old woman, I suppose;—nor yet of a young un. Don't mind waiting for more dinners, or anything of that kind. They likes a man to be hot about it;—that's what they likes. You're sure to find her any time before dinner;—that's at one, you know. May be she mayn't be figged out fine, but you won't mind that. I'll go bail you'll find the flesh and blood all right. Just you make your way in, and say what you've got to say. I'll make it straight with the old woman afterwards."

Ralph Newton had hitherto rather prided himself on his happy management of young ladies. He was not ordinarily much afflicted by shyness, and con-

ceived himself able to declare a passion, perhaps whether felt or feigned, as well as another. And now he was being taught how to go a-wooing by his breeches-maker! He did not altogether like it, and, as at this moment his mind was rather set against the Hendon matrimonial speculation, he was disposed to resent it. "I think you're making a little mistake, Mr. Neefit," he said.

"What mistake? I don't know as I'm making any mistake. You'll be making a mistake, and so you'll find when the plum's gone."

"It's just this, you know. When you suggested this thing to me——"

"Well;—yes; I did suggest it, and I ain't ashamed of it."

"I was awfully grateful. I had met your daughter once or twice, and I told you I admired her ever so much."

"That's true;—but you didn't admire her a bit more than what she's entitled to."

"I'm sure of that. But then I thought I ought,—just to,—know her a little better, you see. And then how could I presume to think she'd take me till she knew me a little better?"

"Presume to think! Is that all you know about young women? Pop the question right out, and give her a buss. That's the way."

Newton paused a moment before he spoke, and looked very grave. "I think you're driving me a little too fast, Mr. Neefit," he said at last.

"The deuce I am! Driving you too fast! What does that mean?"

"There must be a little management and delibera-

tion in these things. If I were to do as you propose, I should not recommend myself to your daughter; and I should feel myself that, at the most important crisis of my life, I was allowing myself to be hurried beyond my judgment." These words were spoken with a slow solemnity of demeanour, and a tone of voice so serious that for a moment they perfectly awed the breeches-maker. Ralph was almost successful in reducing his proposed father-in-law to a state of absolute subjection. Mr. Neefit was all but induced to forget that he stood there with twenty thousand pounds in his pocket. There came a drop or two of perspiration on his brow, and his large saucer eyes almost quailed before those of his debtor. But at last he rallied himself,—though not entirely. He could not quite assume that self-assertion which he knew that his position would have warranted; but he did keep his flag up after a fashion. "I daresay you know your own business best, Mr. Newton;—only them's not my ideas; that's all. I come to you fair and honest, and I repeats the same. Good morning, Mr. Newton." So he went, and nothing had been settled.

To say that Ralph had even yet made up his mind would be to give him praise which was not his due. He was still doubting, though in his doubts the idea of marrying Polly Neefit became more indistinct, and less alluring than ever. By this time he almost hated Mr. Neefit, and most unjustly regarded that man as a persecutor, who was taking advantage of his pecuniary ascendancy to trample on him. "He thinks I must take his daughter because I owe him two or three hundred pounds." Such were Ralph Newton's thoughts about the breeches-maker,—which thoughts were very

unjust. Neefit was certainly vulgar, illiterate, and indelicate; but he was a man who could do a generous action, and having offered his daughter to this young aristocrat, would have scorned to trouble him afterwards about his "little bill." Ralph sat trying to think for about an hour, and then walked to Southampton Buildings. He had not much hope as he went. Indeed hope hardly entered into his feelings. Sir Thomas would of course say unpleasant words to him, and of course he would be unable to answer them. There was no ground for hoping anything,—unless indeed he could make himself happy in a snug little box in a hunting country, with Polly Neefit for his wife, living on the interest of the breeches-maker's money. He was quite alive to the fact that in this position he would in truth be the most miserable dog in existence, —that it would be infinitely better for him to turn his prospects into cash, and buy sheep in Australia, or cattle in South America, or to grow corn in Canada. Any life would be better than one supported in comfortable idleness on Mr. Neefit's savings. Nevertheless he felt that that would most probably be his doom. The sheep or the cattle or the corn required an amount of energy which he no longer possessed. There were the four horses at the Moonbeam;—and he could ride them to hounds as well as any man. So much he could do, and would seem in doing it to be full of life. But as for selling the four horses, and changing altogether the mode of his life,—that was more than he had vitality left to perform. Such was the measure which he took of himself, and in taking it he despised himself thoroughly,—knowing well how poor a creature he was.

Sir Thomas told him readily what he had done, giving him to read a copy of his letter to Mr. Newton and Mr. Newton's reply. "I can do nothing more," said Sir Thomas. "I hope you have given up the sad notion of marrying that young woman." Ralph sat still and listened. "No good, I think, can come of that," continued Sir Thomas. "If you are in truth compelled to part with your reversion to the Newton estate,—which is in itself a property of great value,—I do not doubt but your uncle will purchase it at its worth. It is a thousand pities that prospects so noble should have been dissipated by early imprudence."

"That's quite true, Sir Thomas," said Ralph, in a loud ringing tone, which seemed to imply that let things be as bad as they might, he did not mean to make a poor mouth of them. It was his mask for the occasion, and it sufficed to hide his misery from Sir Thomas.

"If you think of selling what you have to sell," continued Sir Thomas, "you had better take Mr. Newton's letter and put it into the hands of your own attorney. It will be ten times better than going to the money-lending companies for advances. If I had the means of helping you myself, I would do it."

"Oh, Sir Thomas!"

"But I have not. I should be robbing my own girls, which I am sure you would not wish."

"That is quite out of the question, Sir Thomas."

"If you do resolve on selling the estate, you had better come to me as the thing goes on. I can't do much, but I may perhaps be able to see that nothing improper is proposed for you to do. Good-bye, Ralph.

Anything will be better than marrying that what-d'ye-callem's daughter."

Ralph, as he walked westwards towards the club, was by no means sure that Sir Thomas had been right in this. By marrying Polly he would, after all, keep the property.

Just by the lions in Trafalgar Square he met Ontario Moggs. Ontario Moggs scowled at him, and cut him dead.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Rev. Gregory Newton.

It was quite at the end of July, in the very hottest days of a very hot summer, that Squire Newton left Newton Priory for London, intent upon law business, and filled with ambition to purchase the right of leaving his own estate to any heir whom he might himself select. He left his son alone at the Priory; but his son and the parson were sure to be together on such an occasion. Ralph,—the country Ralph,—dined at the Rectory on the day that his father started; and on every succeeding day, Gregory, the parson, dined up at the large house. It was a thing quite understood at the Priory that the present parson Gregory was altogether exempted from the anathema which had been pronounced against the heir and against the memory of the heir's father. Gregory simply filled the place which might have been his had there been no crushing entail, and was, moreover, so sweet and gentle-hearted a fellow that it was impossible not to love him. He was a tall, slender man, somewhat narrow-chested, bright-eyed, with a kind-looking

sweet mouth, a small well-cut nose, dark but not black hair, and a dimple on his chin. He always went with his hands in his pockets, walking quick, but shuffling sometimes in step as though with hesitation, stooping somewhat, absent occasionally, going about with his chin stuck out before him, as though he were seeking something,—he knew not what. A more generous fellow, who delighted more in giving, hesitated more in asking, more averse to begging though a friend of beggars, less self-arrogant, or self-seeking, or more devoted to his profession, never lived. He was a man with prejudices,—kindly, gentlemanlike, amiable prejudices. He thought that a clergyman should be a graduate from one of the three universities,—including Trinity, Dublin; and he thought, also, that a clergyman should be a gentleman. He thought that Dissenters were,—a great mistake. He thought that Convocation should be potential. He thought that the Church had certain powers and privileges which Parliament could not take away except by spoliation. He thought that a parson should always be well-dressed, —according to his order. He thought that the bishop of his diocese was the purest, best, and noblest peer in England. He thought that Newton churchyard was, of all spots on earth, the most lovely. He thought very little of himself. And he thought that of all the delights given by God for the delectation of his creatures, the love of Clarissa Underwood would be the most delightful. In all these thinkings he was astray, carried away by prejudices which he was not strong enough to withstand. But the joint effect of so many faults in judgment was not disagreeable; and, as one result of that effect, Gregory Newton was loved

and respected, and believed in by all men and women, poor and rich, who lived within knowledge of his name. His uncle Gregory, who was wont to be severe in his judgment on men, would declare that the Rev. Gregory,—as he was called,—was perfect. But then the Squire was a man who was himself very much subject to prejudices.

There was now, and ever had been, great freedom of discussion between Ralph Newton of the Priory and his cousin Gregory,—if under the circumstances the two young men may be called cousins,—respecting the affairs of the property. There was naturally much to check or to prevent such freedom. Their own interests in regard to the property were, as far as they went, adverse. The young parson might possibly inherit the whole of the estate, whereas he was aware that the present Squire would move heaven and earth to leave it, or a portion of it, to his own son. Gregory had always taken his brother's part before the Squire; and the Squire, much as he liked the parson, was never slow in abusing the parson's brother. It would have been no more than natural had the question of the property been, by tacit agreement, always kept out of sight between the two young men. But they had grown up from boyhood together as firm friends, and there was no reticence between them on this all-important subject. The Squire's son had never known his mother; and could therefore speak of his own position as would hardly have been possible to him had any memory of her form or person remained with him. And then, though their interests were opposite, nothing that either could say would affect those interests.

The two men were sitting on the lawn at the Priory after dinner, smoking cigars, and Ralph,—this other Ralph,—had just told the parson of his intention of joining his father in London. "I don't see that I can do any good," said Ralph, "but he wishes it, and of course I shall go."

"You won't see my brother, I suppose?"

"I should think not. You know what my father's feelings are, and I certainly shall not go out of my way to offend them. I have no animosity against Ralph; but I could do no good by opposing my father."

"No," said the parson, "not but what I wish it were otherwise. It is a trouble to me that I cannot have Ralph here; though perhaps he would not care to come."

"I feel it hard too, that he should not be allowed to see a place which, in a measure, belongs to him. I wish with all my heart that my father did not think so much about the estate. Much as I love the old place, I can hardly think about it without bitterness. Had my father and your brother been on good terms together, there would have been none of that. Nothing that he could do,—no success in his efforts,—can make me be as I should have been had I been born his heir. It is a misfortune, and of course one feels it; but I think I should feel it less were he not so fixed in his purpose to undo what can never be undone."

"He will never succeed," said Gregory.

"Probably not;—though, for that matter, I suppose Ralph will be driven to raise money on his inheritance."

"He will never sell the property."

"It seems that he does spend money faster than he can get it."

"He may have done so."

"Is he not always in debt to you yourself? Is he not now thinking of marrying some tradesman's daughter, to relieve him of his embarrassments? We have to own, I suppose, that Master Ralph has made a mess of his money matters?" The parson, who couldn't deny the fact, hardly knew what to say on his brother's behalf. "I protest to you, Greg., that if my father were to tell me that he had changed his mind, and paid your brother's debts out of sheer kindness and uncleship, and the rest of it, I should be well pleased. But he won't do that, and it does seem to me probable that the estate will get into the hands of Jews, financiers, and professional money-dealers, unless my father can save it. You wouldn't be glad to see some shopkeeper's daughter calling herself Mrs. Newton of Newton."

"A shopkeeper's daughter need not necessarily be a—a—a bad sort of woman," said Gregory.

"The chances are that a shopkeeper's daughter will not be an educated lady. Come, Greg.; you cannot say that it is the kind of way out of the mess you would approve."

"I am so sorry that there should be any mess at all!"

"Just so. It is a pity that there should be any mess;—is not it? Come, old fellow, drink your coffee, and let us take a turn across the park. I want to see what Larkin is doing about those sheep. I often feel that my coming into the world was a mess altogether; though, now that I am here, I must make the best of

it. If I hadn't come, my father would have married, and had a score of children, and Master Ralph would have been none the better for it."

"You'll go and see the Underwoods," said the parson, as they were walking across the park.

"If you wish it, I will."

"I do wish it. They know all the history as a matter of course. It cannot be otherwise. And they have so often heard me talk of you. The girls are simply perfect. I shall write to Miss Underwood, and tell her that you will call. I hope, too, that you will see Sir Thomas. It would be so much better that he should know you."

That same night Gregory Newton wrote the two following letters before he went to bed;—the first written was to Miss Underwood, and the second to his brother; but we will place the latter first:—

"Newton, 4th August, 186—.

"MY DEAR RALPH,

"No doubt you know by this time that my uncle, Gregory, is in London, though you will probably not have seen him. I understand that he has come up with the express purpose of making some settlement in regard to the property, on account of your embarrassments. I need not tell you how sorry I am that the state of your affairs should make this necessary. Ralph goes up also to-morrow;—and though he does not purpose to hunt you up, I hope that you may meet. You know what I think of him, and how much I wish that you two could be friends. He is as generous as the sun, and as just as he is generous. Every

Newton ought to make him welcome as one of the family.

"As to money, I do not know what may be the state of your affairs, I only hear from him what he hears from his father. Sooner than that you should endanger your inheritance here I will make any sacrifice,—if there be anything that I can do. You are welcome to sell my share of the Holborn property, and you can pay me after my uncle's death. I can get on very well with my living, as it is not probable that I shall marry. At any rate, understand that I should infinitely prefer to lose every shilling of the London property to hearing that you had imperilled your position here at Newton. I do not suppose that what I have can go far;—but as far as it will go it is at your service. You can show this letter to Sir Thomas if you think fit.

"I could say ever so much more, only that you will know it all without my saying it. And I cannot bear that you should think that I would preach sermons to you. Never mind what I said before about the money that I wanted then. I can do without it now. My uncle will pay for the entire repair of the chancel out of his own pocket. Ever so much must be left undone till more money comes in. Money does come in from this quarter or from that, by God's help. As for the church rates, of course I regret them. But we have to take things in a lump, and it is certainly the fact that we spend ten times as much on the churches as was spent fifty years ago.

"Your most affectionate brother,

"GREGORY NEWTON."

The other letter was much shorter, and was addressed to Patience Underwood:—

"Newton Peele Parsonage, 4th August, 186—.

"MY DEAR MISS UNDERWOOD,

"My cousin, Mr. Ralph Newton, of whom you have heard me speak so often, is going up to London, and I have asked him to call at Popham Villa, because I am desirous that so very dear a friend of mine should know other friends whom I love so dearly. I am sure you will receive him kindly for my sake, and that you will like him for his own. There are reasons why I wish that your father should know him.

"Give my most affectionate love to your sister. I can send her no other message, and I do not think she will be angry with me for sending that. It cannot hurt her; and she and you at least know how honest and how true it is. Distance and time make no difference. It is as though I were on the lawn with her now.

"Most sincerely yours,

"GREGORY NEWTON."

When he had written this in the little book-room of his parsonage he opened the window, and, crossing the garden, seated himself on a low brick wall, which divided his small domain from the churchyard. The night was bright with stars, but there was no moon in the heavens, and the gloom of the old ivy-coloured church tower was complete. But all the outlines of the place were so well known to him that he could trace them all in the dim light. After a while he got down among the graves, and with slow steps walked round

and round the precincts of his church. Here, at least, in this spot, close to the house of God which was his own church, within this hallowed enclosure, which was his own freehold in a peculiar manner, he could, after a fashion, be happy, in spite of the misfortunes of himself and his family. His lines had been laid for him in very pleasant places. According to his ideas there was no position among the children of men more blessed, more diversified, more useful, more noble, than that which had been awarded to him,—if only, by God's help, he could perform with adequate zeal and ability the high duties which had been entrusted to him. Things outside were dark,—at least, so said the squires and parsons around him, with whom he was wont to associate. His uncle, Gregory, was sure that all things were going to the dogs, since a so-called Tory leader had become an advocate for household suffrage, and real Tory gentlemen had condescended to follow him. But to our parson it had always seemed that there was still a fresh running stream of water for him who would care to drink from a fresh stream. He heard much of unbelief, and of the professors of unbelief, both within and without the great Church;—but in that little church with which he was personally concerned there were more worshippers now than there had ever been before. And he heard, too, how certain well-esteemed preachers and prophets of the day talked loudly of the sins of the people, and foretold destruction such as was the destruction of Gomorrah;—but to him it seemed that the people of his village were more honest, less given to drink, and certainly better educated than their fathers. In all which thoughts he found matter for hope and en-

couragement in his daily life. And he set himself to work diligently, placing all this as a balance against his private sorrows, so that he might teach himself to take that world, of which he himself was the centre, as one whole,—and so to walk on rejoicing.

The one great sorrow of his life, the thorn in the flesh which was always festering, the wound which would not be cured, the grief for which there was no remedy, was his love for Clarissa Underwood. He had asked her thrice to be his wife,—with very little interval, indeed, between the separate prayers,—and had been so answered that he entertained no hope. Had there been any faintest expectation in his mind that Clarissa would at last become his wife he would have been deterred by a sense of duty from making to his brother that generous offer of all the property he owned. But he had no such hope. Clarissa had given thrice that answer, which of all answers is the most grievous to the true-hearted lover. "She felt for him unbounded esteem, and would always regard him as a friend." A short decided negative, or a doubtful no, or even an indignant repulse, may be changed, may give way to second convictions, or to better acquaintance, or to altered circumstances, or even simply to perseverance. But an assurance of esteem and friendship means, and only can mean, that the lady regards her lover as she might do some old uncle or patriarchal family connection, whom, after a fashion, she loves, but who can never be to her the one creature to be worshipped above all others.

Such were Gregory Newton's ideas as to his own chance of success, and, so believing, he had resolved that he would never press his suit again. He en-

deavoured to conquer his love;—but that he found to be impossible. He thought that it was so impossible that he had determined to give up the endeavour. Though he would have advised others that by God's mercy all sorrows in this world could be cured, he told himself,—without arraigning God's mercy,—that for him this sorrow could not be cured. He did not scruple, therefore, to assure his brother that he would not marry,—nor did he hesitate, in writing to Patience Underwood, to assure her that his love for her sister was unchangeable. In saying so he urged no suit,—but it was impossible that he should write to the house without some message, and none other from him to her could be a true message. It could not hurt her. It would not even give her the trouble to think whether she had decided well. He quite understood the nature of the love he wanted,—a love that would have felt it to be all happiness to lean upon his bosom. Without this love he would not have wished to take her;—and with such love as that he knew he could not fill her heart. Therefore it was that he would satisfy himself with walking round the churchyard of Newton Peele, and telling himself that the pleasure of this world was best to be found in the pursuit of the joys of the next.

CHAPTER XV.

Clarissa waits.

When Patience and Clarissa had got to their own room on the night on which they had walked back from Mrs. Brownlow's house to Popham Villa,—during all which long walk Clarissa's hand had lain gently

upon Ralph Newton's arm,—the elder sister looked painfully and anxiously into the younger's face, in order that, if it were possible, she might learn without direct enquiry what had been said during that hour of close communion. Had Ralph meant to speak there could have been no time more appropriate. And Patience hardly knew what she herself wished, except that she wished that her sister might have everything that was good and joyous and prosperous. There was never a look of pain came across Clary's face, but Patience suffered some touch of inner agony. This feeling was so strong that she sympathized even with Clary's follies, and with Clary's faults. She almost knew that it would not be well that Ralph Newton should be encouraged as a lover,—brilliant as were his future prospects, and dear as he was personally to them all. He was a spendthrift, and it might be that his fine prospects would all be wasted before they were matured. And then their father would so probably disapprove! And then, again, it was so wrong that Clary's peace should have been disturbed and yet no word said to their father. There was much that was wrong;—but still so absolute was her clinging love for Clary that she longed above all things that Clary should be made happy. When Ralph's brother had declared himself as a suitor,—which he had done boldly to Sir Thomas, after but a short intimacy with the family,—Patience had given him all her sympathy. Sir Thomas, having looked at his circumstances, had made him welcome to the house, and to his daughter's hand,—if he could win her heart. The stage had been open to him, and Patience had been his most eager friend. But all that had passed away,—and

Clary had been obstinate. "Patty," she had said, with some little arrogance, "he has made a mistake. He should have fallen in love with you." "Clergymen are as fond of pretty girls as other men," Patty had said, with a smile. "And isn't my Patty as pretty and as delicate as a primrose?" Clary had said, embracing her sister. Pretty Patience Underwood was not;—but for delicacy,—that with which Patience Underwood was gifted transcended poor Clarissa's powers of comparison. So it was between them, and now there was this acknowledged passion for the spendthrift!

Patience could see that her sister was not unhappy when she came in from her walk,—was not moody,—was not heart-broken. And yet it had seemed to her, before the walk began, while they were sauntering about Mrs. Brownlow's garden, that Ralph had devoted himself entirely to the new cousin, and that Clarissa had been miserable. Surely if he had spoken during the walk,—if he had renewed his protestations of love, if he were now regarded by Clary as her accepted lover, Clary would not keep all this as a secret! It could not be that Clary should have surrendered herself to a lover, and that their father was to be allowed to remain in ignorance that it was so! And yet how could it be otherwise if Clary was happy now,—Clary who had acknowledged that she loved this man, and had now been leaning on his arm for an hour beneath the moonlight? But Patience said not a word. She could not bring herself to speak when speech might pain her sister.

When they had been some half hour in bed, there stole a whisper across the darkness of the chamber from one couch to the other:

"Patty, are you asleep?" Patience declared that she was wide awake. "Then I'll come to you,"—and Clary's naked feet pattered across the room. "I've just something to say, and I'll say it better here." Patience made glad way for the intruder, and knew that now she would hear it all. "Patty, it is better to wait."

"What do you mean, dear?"

"I mean this. I think he does like me; I'm almost sure he does."

"He said nothing to-night?"

"He said a great deal,—of course; but nothing about that;—nothing about that exactly."

"Oh, Clary, I'm afraid of him."

"What is the good of fear? The evil is, dear, I think he likes me, but it may so well be that he cannot speak out. He is in debt, and all that;—and he must wait."

"But that is so terrible. What will you do?"

"I will wait too. I have thought about it, and have determined. What's the good of loving a man if one won't go through something for him? I do love him,—with all my heart. I pray God I may never have a husband, if I cannot be his wife." Patience shuddered in her sister's embrace, as these bold words were spoken with energy. "I tell you, Patty, just as I tell myself, because you love me so dearly."

"I do love you;—oh, I do love you."

"I do not think it can be unmaidenly to tell the truth to you and to myself. How can I help telling it to myself? There it is. I feel that I could kiss the very ground on which he stands. He is my hero, my

Paladin, my heart, my soul. I have given myself to him for everything. How can I help myself?"

"But, Clary,—you should repress this, not encourage it."

"It won't be repressed,—not in my own heart. But I will never, never, never let him know that it has been so,—till he is all my own. There may be a day when,—oh, I shall tell him everything; how wretched I was when he did not speak to me; how broken-hearted when I heard his voice with Mary; how fluttered, and half-happy, and half-wretched when I found that I was to have that long walk with him;—and then how I determined to wait. I will tell him all,—perhaps,—some day. Good-night, dear, dear Patty. I could not sleep without letting you know everything." Then she sprang out from her sister's arms, and pattered back across the room to her own bed. In two minutes Clarissa was asleep, but Patience lay long awake, and before she slept her pillow was damp with her tears.

In the course of the following week Ralph was again at the villa. Sir Thomas, as a matter of course, was away, but the three girls were at home; and, as it happened, Miss Spooner had also come over to take her tea with her friends. The hour that he spent there was passed half indoors and half out, and certainly Ralph's attentions were chiefly paid to Miss Bonner. Miss Bonner herself, however, was so discreet in her demeanour, that no one could have suggested that any approach had been made to flirtation. To tell the truth, Mary, who had received no confidence from her cousin,—and who was a girl slow to excite or give a confidence,—had seen some sign, or

heard some word which had created on her mind a suspicion of the truth. It was not that she thought that Clary's heart was irrecoverably given to the young man, but that there seemed to be just something with which it might be as well that she herself should not interfere. She was there on sufferance,—dependent on her uncle's charity for her daily bread, let her uncle say what he might to the contrary. As yet she hardly knew her cousins, and was quite sure that she was not known by them. She heard that Ralph Newton was a man of fashion, and the heir to a large fortune. She knew herself to be utterly destitute,—but she knew herself to be possessed of great beauty. In her bosom, doubtless, there was an ambition to win by her beauty, from some man whom she could love, those good things of which she was so destitute. She did not lack ambition, and had her high hopes, grounded on the knowledge of her own charms. Her beauty, and a certain sufficiency of intellect,—of the extent of which she was in a remarkable degree herself aware, —were the gifts with which she had been endowed. But she knew when she might use them honestly, and when she ought to refrain from using them. Ralph had looked at her as men do look who wish to be allowed to love. All this to her was much more clearly intelligible than to Clarissa, who was two years her senior. Though she had seen Ralph but thrice, she already felt that she might have him on his knees before her, if she cared so to place him. But there was that suspicion of something which had gone before, and a feeling that honour and gratitude,—perhaps, also, self-interest,—called upon her to be cold in her manner to Ralph Newton. She had purposely avoided

his companionship in their walk home from Mrs. Brownlow's house; and now, as they wandered about the lawn and shrubberies of Popham Villa, she took care not to be with him out of earshot of the others. In all of which there was ten times more of womanly cleverness,—or cunning, shall we say,—than had yet come to the possession of Clarissa Underwood.

Cunning she was;—but she did not deserve that the objectionable epithet should be applied to her. The circumstances of her life had made her cunning. She had been the mistress of her father's house since her fifteenth year, and for two years of her life had had a succession of admirers at her feet. Her father had eaten and drank and laughed, and had joked with his child's lovers about his child. It had been through no merit of his that she had held her own among them all without soiling either her name or her inner self. Captains in West Indian regiments, and lieutenants from Queen's ships lying at Spanish Point, had been her admirers. Proposals to marry are as ready on the tongues of such men, out in the tropics, as offers to hand a shawl or carry a parasol. They are soft-hearted, bold to face the world, and very confident in circumstances. Then, too, they are ignorant of any other way to progress with a flirtation which is all-engrossing. In warm latitudes it is so natural to make an offer after the fifth dance. It is the way of the people in those latitudes, and seems to lead to no harm. Men and women do marry on small incomes; but they do not starve, and the world goes on wagging. Mary Bonner, however, whose father's rank had, at least, been higher than that of her adorers, and who knew that great gifts had been given to her, had held

herself aloof from all this, and had early resolved to bide her time. She was still biding her time,—with patience sufficient to enable her to resist the glances of Ralph Newton.

Clarissa Underwood behaved very well on this evening. She gave a merry glance at her sister, and devoted herself to Miss Spooner. Mary was so wise and so prudent that there was no cause for any great agony. As far as Clary could see, Ralph had quite as much to say to Patience as to Mary. For herself she had resolved that she would wait. Her manner to him was very pretty,—almost the manner of a sister to a brother. And then she stayed resolutely with Miss Spooner, while Ralph was certainly tempting Mary down by the river-side. It did not last long. He was soon gone, and Miss Spooner had soon followed him.

"He is very amusing," Mary said, as soon as they were alone.

"Very amusing," said Patience.

"And uncommonly good-looking. Isn't he considered a very handsome man here?"

"Yes;—I suppose he is," said Patience. "I don't know that I ever thought much about that."

"Of course he is," said Clarissa. "Nobody can doubt it. There are some people as to whom it is as absurd not to admit that they are handsome as it would be to say that a fine picture is not beautiful. Ralph is one such person,—and of course I know another."

Mary would not seem to take the allusion, even by a smile. "I always thought Gregory much nicer looking," said Patience.

"That must be because you are in love with him," said Clarissa.

"There is a speaking brightness, an eloquence, in his eyes; and a softness of feeling in the expression of his face, which is above all beauty," continued Patience, with energy.

"Here's poetry," said Clarissa. "Eloquence, and softness, and eyes, and feeling, and expressive and speaking brightness! You'd better say at once that he's a god."

"I wish I knew him," said Mary Bonner.

"You'll know him before long, I don't doubt. And when you do, you'll know one of the best fellows in the world. I'll admit as much as that; but I will not admit that he can be compared to his brother in regard to good looks." In all which poor Clarissa, who had nothing to console her but her resolve to wait with courage, bore herself well and gallantly.

Soon after this there arrived at Popham Villa the note from Gregory Newton. As it happened, Sir Thomas was at home on that morning, and heard the tidings. "If young Mr. Newton does come, get him to dine, and I will take care to be at home," said Sir Thomas. Patience suggested that Ralph,—their own Ralph,—should be asked to meet him; but to this Sir Thomas would not accede. "It is not our business to make up a family quarrel," he said. "I have had old Mr. Newton with me once or twice lately, and I find that the quarrel still exists as strong as ever. I asked him to dine here, but he refused. His son chooses to come. I shall be glad to see him."

Gregory's letter had not been shown to Sir Thomas, but it was, of course, shown to Clarissa. "How could I help it?" said she. From which it may be presumed that Patience had looked as though Gregory had been

hardly treated. "One doesn't know how it is, or why it comes, or what it is;—or why it doesn't come. I couldn't have taken Gregory Newton for my husband."

"And yet he had all things to recommend him."

"I wish he had asked you, Patty!"

"Don't say that, dear, because there is in it something that annoys me. I don't think of myself in such matters, but I do hope to see you the happy wife of some happy man."

"I hope you will, with all my heart," said Clary, standing up,—"of one man, of one special, dearest, best, and brightest of all men. Oh dear! And yet I know it will never be, and I wonder at myself that I have been bold enough to tell you." And Patience, also, wondered at her sister's boldness.

Ralph Newton,—Ralph from the Priory,—did come down to the villa, and did accept the invitation to dinner which was given to him. The event was so important that Patience found it necessary to go up to London to tell her father. Mary went with her, desirous to see something of the mysteries of Southampton Buildings, while Clarissa remained at home,—waiting. After the usual skirmishes with Stemm, who began by swearing that his master was not at home, they made their way into Sir Thomas's library. "Dear, dear, dear; this is a very awkward place to bring your cousin to," he said, frowning. Mary would have retreated at once had it not been that Patience held her ground so boldly. "Why shouldn't she come, papa? And I had to see you. Mr. Newton is to dine with us to-morrow." To-morrow was a Saturday, and Sir Thomas became seriously displeased. Why had a Saturday been chosen? Saturday was the most awkward day in the world for

the giving and receiving of dinners. It was in vain that Patience explained to him that Saturday was the only day on which Mr. Newton could come, that Sir Thomas had given his express authority for the dinner, and that no bar had been raised against Saturday. "You ought to have known," said Sir Thomas. Nevertheless, he allowed them to leave the chamber with the understanding that he would preside at his own table on the following day.

"Why is it that Saturday is so distasteful to him?" Mary asked as they walked across Lincoln's Inn Fields together.

Patience was silent for awhile, not knowing how to answer the question, or how to leave it unanswered. But at last she preferred to make some reply. "He does not like going to our church, I think."

"But you like it."

"Yes;—and I wish papa did. But he doesn't." Then there was a pause. "Of course it must strike you as very odd, the way in which we live."

"I hope it is not I who drive my uncle away."

"Not in the least, Mary. Since mamma's death he has fallen into this habit, and he has got so to love solitude, that he is never happy but when alone. We ought to be grateful to him because it shows that he trusts us; but it would be much nicer if he would come home."

"He is so different from my father."

"He was always with you."

"Well;—yes; that is, I could be always with him, almost always. He was so fond of society that he would never be alone. We had a great rambling house, always full of people. If he could see people

pleasant and laughing, that was all that he wanted. It is hard to say what is best."

"Papa is as good to us as ever he can be."

"So was my papa good to me,—in his way; but, oh dear, the people that used to come there! Poor papa! He used to say that hospitality was his chief duty. I sometimes used to think that the world would be much pleasanter and better if there was no such thing as hospitality;—if people always ate and drank alone, and lived as uncle does, in his chambers. There would not be so much money wasted, at any rate."

"Papa never wastes any money," said Patience—"though there never was a more generous man."

Ralph Newton,—Ralph of the Priory,—came to dinner, and Miss Spooner was asked to meet him. It might have been supposed that a party so composed would not have been very bright, but the party at the villa went off very satisfactorily. Ralph made himself popular with everybody. He became very popular with Sir Thomas by the frank and easy way in which he spoke of the family difficulties at Newton. "I wish my namesake knew my father," he said, when he was alone with the lawyer after dinner. He never spoke of either of these Newtons as his cousins, though to Gregory, whom he knew well and loved dearly, he would declare that from him he felt entitled to exact all the dues of cousinship.

"It would be desirable," said Sir Thomas.

"I never give it up. You know my father, I dare say. He thought his brother interfered with him, and I suppose he did. But a more affectionate or generous man never lived. He is quite as fond of Gregory as

he is of me, and would do anything on earth that Gregory told him. He is rebuilding a chancel of the church just because Gregory wishes it. Some day I hope they may be reconciled."

"It is hard to get over money difficulties," said Sir Thomas.

"I don't see why there should be money difficulties," said Ralph. "As far as I am concerned there need be none."

"Ralph Newton has made money difficulties," said Sir Thomas. "If he had been careful with his own fortune there would have been no question as to the property between him and your father."

"I can understand that;—and I can understand also my father's anxiety, though I do not share it. It would be better that my namesake should have the estate. I can see into these matters quite well enough to know that were it to be mine there would occur exactly that which my father wishes to avoid. I should be the owner of Newton Priory, and people would call me Mr. Newton. But I shouldn't be Newton of Newton. It had better go to Ralph. I should live elsewhere, and people would not notice me then."

Sir Thomas, as he looked up at the young man, leaning back in his arm-chair and holding his glass half full of wine in his hand, could not but tell himself that the greater was the pity. This off-shoot of the Newton stock, who declared of himself that he never could be Newton of Newton, was a fine, manly fellow to look at,—not handsome as was Ralph the heir, not marked by that singular mixture of gentleness, intelligence, and sweetness which was written, not only on the countenance, but in the demeanour

and very step of Gregory; but he was a bigger man than either of them, with a broad chest, and a square brow, and was not without that bright gleam of the Newton blue eye, which characterised all the family. And there was so much of the man in him;—whereas, in manhood, Ralph the heir had certainly been deficient. "Ralph must lie on the bed that he has made," said Sir Thomas. "And you, of course, will accept the good things that come in your way. As far as I can see at present it will be best for Ralph that your father should redeem from him a portion, at least, of the property. The girls are waiting for us to go out, and perhaps you will like a cigar on the lawn."

It was clear to every one there to see that this other Newton greatly admired the West Indian cousin. And Mary, with this new-comer, seemed to talk on easier terms than she had ever done before since she had been at Fulham. She smiled, and listened, and was gracious, and made those pleasant little half-affected sallies which girls do make to men when they know that they are admired, and are satisfied that it should be so. All the story had been told to her, and it might be that the poor orphan felt that she was better fitted to associate with the almost nameless one than with the true heir of the family. Mr. Newton, when he got up to leave them, asked permission to come again, and left them all with a pleasant air of intimacy. Two boats had passed them, racing on the river, almost close to the edge of their lawn, and Newton had offered to bet with Mary as to which would first reach the bridge. "I wish you had taken my wager, Miss Bonner," he said, "because then I

should have been bound to come back at once to pay you." "That's all very well, Mr. Newton," said Mary, "but I have heard of gentlemen who are never seen again when they lose." "Mr. Newton is unlike that, I'm sure," said Clary; "but I hope he'll come again at any rate." Newton promised that he would, and was fully determined to keep his promise when he made it.

"Wouldn't it be delightful if they were to fall in love with each other and make a match of it?" said Clary to her sister.

"I don't like to plot and plan such things," said Patience.

"I don't like to scheme, but I don't see any harm in planning. He is ever so nice,—isn't he?"

"I thought him very pleasant."

"Such an open-spoken, manly, free sort of fellow. And he'll be very well off, you know."

"I don't know;—but I dare say he will," said Patience.

"Oh yes, you do. Poor Ralph, our Ralph, is a spendthrift, and I shouldn't wonder if this one were to have the property after all. And then his father is very rich. I know that, because Gregory told me. Dear me! wouldn't it be odd if we were all three to become Mrs. Newtons?"

"Clary, what did I tell you?"

"Well; I won't. But it would be odd,—and so nice, at least I think so. Well;—I dare say I ought not to say it. But then I can't help thinking it,—and surely I may tell you what I think."

"I would think it as little as I could, dear."

"Ah, that's very well. A girl can be a hypocrite

if she pleases, and perhaps she ought. Of course I shall be a hypocrite to all the world except you. I tell you what it is, Patty;—you make me tell you everything, and say that of course you and I are to tell everything,—and then you scold me. Don't you want me to tell you everything?"

"Indeed I do;—and I won't scold you. Dear Clary, do I scold you? Wouldn't I give one of my eyes to make you happy?"

"That's quite a different thing," said Clarissa.

Three days afterwards Mr. Ralph Newton;—it is hoped that the reader may understand the attempts which are made to designate the two young men;—Mr. Ralph Newton appeared again at Popham Villa. He came in almost with the gait of an old friend, and brought some fern leaves, which he had already procured from Hampshire, in compliance with a promise which he had made to Patience Underwood. "That's what we call the hart's tongue," said he, "though I fancy they give them all different names in different places."

"It's the same plant as ours, Mr. Newton,—only yours is larger."

"It's the ugliest of all the ferns," said Clary.

"Even that's a compliment," said Newton. "It's no use transplanting them in this weather, but I'll send you a basket in October. You should come down to Newton and see our ferns. We think we're very pretty, but because we're so near, nobody comes to see us." Then he fell a-talking with Mary Bonner, and stayed at the villa nearly all the afternoon. For a moment or two he was alone with Clarissa, and at once expressed his admiration. "I don't think I

ever saw such perfect beauty as your cousin's," he said.

"She is handsome."

"And then she is so fair, whereas everybody expects to see dark eyes and black hair come from the West Indies."

"But Mary wasn't born there."

"That doesn't matter. The mind doesn't travel back as far as that. A negro should be black, and an American thin, and a French woman should have her hair dragged up by the roots, and a German should be broad-faced, and a Scotchman red-haired,—and a West Indian beauty should be dark and languishing."

"I'll tell her you say so, and perhaps she'll have herself altered."

"Whatever you do, don't let her be altered," said Mr. Newton. "She can't be changed for the better."

"I am quite sure he is over head and ears in love," said Clarissa to Patience that evening.

CHAPTER XVI.

The Cheshire Cheese.

"LABOUR is the salt of the earth, and Capital is the sworn foe to Labour." Hear, hear, hear, with the clattering of many glasses, and the smashing of certain pipes! Then the orator went on. "That Labour should be the salt of the earth has been the purpose of a beneficent Creator;—that Capital should be the foe to Labour has been man's handywork. The one is an eternal decree, which nothing can change,—which neither the good nor the evil done by man can affect. The other is an evil ordinance, the fruit of

man's ignorance, and within the scope of man's intellect to annul."

Mr. Ontario Moggs was the orator, and he was at this moment addressing a crowd of sympathising friends in the large front parlour of the Cheshire Cheese. Of all those who were listening to Ontario Moggs there was not probably one who had reached a higher grade in commerce than that of an artisan working for weekly wages;—but Mr. Moggs was especially endeared to them because he was not an artisan working for weekly wages, but himself a capitalist. His father was a master bootmaker on a great scale;—for none stood much higher in the West-end trade than Booby and Moggs; and it was known that Ontario was the only child and heir, and as it were sole owner of the shoulders on which must some day devolve the mantle of Booby and Moggs. Booby had long been gathered to his fathers, and old Moggs was the stern opponent of strikes. What he had lost by absolutely refusing to yield a point during the last strike among the shoemakers of London no one could tell. He had professed aloud that he would sooner be ruined, sooner give up his country residence at Shepherd's Bush, sooner pull down the honoured names of Booby and Moggs from over the shop-window in Old Bond Street, than allow himself to be driven half an inch out of his course by men who were attempting to dictate to him what he should do with his own. In these days of strikes Moggs would look even upon his own workmen with the eyes of a Coriolanus glaring upon the disaffected populace of Rome. Mr. Moggs senior would stand at his shop-door, with his hand within his waistcoat, watching the men out on strike who were picket-

ing the streets round his shop, and would feel himself every inch a patrician, ready to die for his order. Such was Moggs senior. And Moggs junior, who was a child of Capital, but whose heirship depended entirely on his father's will, harangued his father's workmen and other workmen at the Cheshire Cheese, telling them that Labour was the salt of the earth, and that Capital was the foe to Labour! Of course they loved him. The demagogue who is of all demagogues the most popular, is the demagogue who is a demagogue in opposition to his apparent nature. The Radical Earl, the free-thinking parson, the squire who won't preserve, the tenant who defies his landlord, the capitalist with a theory for dividing profits, the Moggs who loves a strike,—these are the men whom the working men delight to follow. Ontario Moggs, who was at any rate honest in his philanthropy, and who did in truth believe that it was better that twenty real bootmakers should eat beef daily, than that one so-called bootmaker should live in a country residence,—who believed this and acted on his belief, though he was himself not of the twenty, but rather the one so-called bootmaker, who would suffer by the propagation of such a creed,—was beloved and almost worshipped by the denizens of the Cheshire Cheese. How far the real philanthropy of the man may have been marred by an uneasy and fatuous ambition; how far he was carried away by a feeling that it was better to make speeches at the Cheshire Cheese than to apply for payment of money due to his father, it would be very hard for us to decide. That there was an alloy even in Ontario Moggs is probable;—but of this alloy his hearers knew nothing. To them he

was a perfect specimen of that combination, which is so grateful to them, of the rich man's position with the poor man's sympathies. Therefore they clattered their glasses, and broke their pipes, and swore that the words he uttered were the kind of stuff they wanted.

"The battle has been fought since man first crawled upon the earth," continued Moggs, stretching himself to his full height, and pointing to the farthest confines of the inhabited globe;—"since man first crawled upon the earth." There was a sound in that word "crawl" typical of the abject humility to which working shoemakers were subjected by their employers, which specially aroused the feelings of the meeting. "And whence comes the battle?" The orator paused, and the glasses were jammed upon the table. "Yes,—whence comes the battle, in fighting which hecatombs of honest labourers have been crushed till the sides of the mountains are white with their bones, and the rivers run foul with their blood? From the desire of one man to eat the bread of two!" "That's it," said a lean, wizened, pale-faced little man in a corner, whose trembling hand was resting on a beaker of gin and water. "Yes, and to wear two men's coats and trousers, and to take two men's bedses, and the wery witals out of two men's bodies. D—— them!" Ontario, who understood something of his trade as an orator, stood with his hand still stretched out, waiting till this ebullition should be over. "No, my friend," said he, "we will not damn them. I for one will damn no man. I will simply rebel. Of all the sacraments given to us, the sacrament of rebellion is the most holy." Hereupon the landlord of the Cheshire Cheese must have feared for his tables, so great was

the applause and so tremendous the thumping;—but he knew his business, no doubt, and omitted to interfere. "Of Rebellion, my friends," continued Ontario, with his right hand now gracefully laid across his breast, "there are two kinds,—or perhaps we may say three. There is the rebellion of arms, which can avail us nothing here." "Perhaps it might tho'," said the little wizened man in a corner, whose gin and water apparently did not comfort him. To this interruption Ontario paid no attention. "And there is the dignified and slow rebellion of moral resistance;—too slow I fear for us." This point was lost upon the audience, and though the speaker paused, no loud cheer was given. "It's as true as true," said one man; but he was a vain fellow, simply desirous of appearing wiser than his comrades. "And then there is the rebellion of the Strike;" now the clamour of men's voices, and the kicking of men's feet, and the thumping with men's fists became more frantic than ever; "——the legitimate rebellion of Labour against its tyrant. Gentlemen, of all efforts this is the most noble. It is a sacrifice of self, a martyrdom, a giving up on the part of him who strikes of himself, his little ones, and his wife, for the sake of others who can only thus be rescued from the grasp of tyranny. Gentlemen, were it not for strikes, this would be a country in which no free man could live. By the aid of strikes we will make it the Paradise of the labourer, an Elysium of industry, an Eden of artizans." There was much more of it,—but the reader might be fatigued were the full flood of Mr. Moggs's oratory to be let loose upon him. And through it all there was a germ of truth and a strong dash of true, noble feeling;—but the speaker had omitted as

yet to learn how much thought must be given to a germ of truth before it can be made to produce fruit for the multitude. And then, in speaking, grand words come so easily, while thoughts,—even little thoughts,—flow so slowly!

But the speech, such as it was, sufficed amply for the immediate wants of the denizens of the Cheshire Cheese. There were men there who for the half-hour believed that Ontario Moggs had been born to settle all the difficulties between labourers and their employers, and that he would do so in such a way that the labourers, at least, should have all that they wanted. It would be, perhaps, too much to say that any man thought this would come in his own day,—that he so believed as to put a personal trust in his own belief; but they did think for a while that the good time was coming, and that Ontario Moggs would make it come. "We'll have 'im in parl'ament any ways," said a sturdy, short, dirty-looking artizan, who shook his head as he spoke to show that, on that matter, his mind was quite made up. "I dunno no good as is to cum of sending sich as him to parl'ament," said another. "Parl'ament ain't the place. When it comes to the p'int they won't 'ave 'em. There was Odgers, and Mr. Beale. I don't b'lieve in parl'ament no more." "Kennington Oval's about the place," said a third. "Or Primrose 'ill," said a fourth. "Hyde Park!" screamed the little wizen man with the gin and water. "That's the ticket;—and down with them gold railings. We'll let 'em see!" Nevertheless they all went away home in the quietest way in the world, and,—as there was no strike in hand,—got to their work punctually on the next morning. Of all

those who had been loudest at the Cheshire Cheese there was not one who was not faithful, and, in a certain way, loyal to his employer.

As soon as his speech was over and he was able to extricate himself from the crowd, Ontario Moggs escaped from the public-house and strutted off through certain narrow, dark streets in the neighbourhood, leaning on the arm of a faithful friend. "Mr. Moggs, you did pitch it raythe strong, to-night," said his faithful friend.

"Pitch it rather strong;—yes. What good do you think can ever come from pitching anything weak? Pitch it as strong as you will, and it don't amount to much."

"But about rebellion, now, Mr. Moggs? Rebellion ain't a good thing, surely, Mr. Moggs?"

"Isn't it? What was Washington, what was Cromwell, what was Rienzi, what was,—was,—; but never mind," said Ontario, who could not at the moment think of the name of his favourite Pole.

"And you think as the men should be rebels again' the masters?"

"That depends on who the masters are, Waddle."

"What good 'd cum of it if I rebelled again' Mr. Neefit, and told him up to his face as I wouldn't make up the books? He'd only sack me. I find thirty-five bob a week, with two kids and their mother to keep on it, tight enough, Mr. Moggs. If I 'ad the fixing on it, I should say forty bob wasn't over the mark;— I should indeed. But I don't see as I should get it."

"Yes you would;—if you earned it, and stuck to

your purpose. But you're a single stick, and it requires a faggot to do this work."

"I never could see it, Mr. Moggs. All the same I do like to hear you talk. It stirs one up, even though one don't just go along with it. You won't let on, you know, to Mr. Neefit as I was there."

"And why not?" said Ontario, turning sharp upon his companion.

"The old gen'leman hates the very name of a strike. He's a'most as bad as your own father, Mr. Moggs."

"You have done his work to-day. You have earned your bread. You owe him nothing."

"That I don't, Mr. Moggs. He'll take care of that."

"And yet you are to stay away from this place, or go to that, to suit his pleasure. Are you Neefit's slave?"

"I'm just the young man in his shop,—that's all."

"As long as that is all, Waddle, you are not worthy to be called a man."

"Mr. Moggs, you're too hard. As for being a man, I am a man. I've a wife and two kids. I don't think more of my governor than another;—but if he sacked me, where'd I get thirty-five bob a-week?"

"I beg your pardon, Waddle;—it's true. I should not have said it. Perhaps you do not quite understand me, but your position is one of a single stick, rather than of the faggot. Ah me! She hasn't been at the shop lately?"

"She do come sometimes. She was there the day before yesterday."

"And alone?"

"She come alone, and she went home with the governor."

"And he?"

"Mr. Newton, you mean?"

"Has he been there?"

"Well;—yes; he was there once last week."

"Well?"

"There was words;—that's what there was. It ain't going smooth, and he ain't been out there no more,—not as I knows on. I did say a word once or twice as to the precious long figure as he stands for on our books. Over two hundred for breeches is something quite stupendous. Isn't it, Mr. Moggs?"

"And what did Neefit say?"

"Just snarled at me. He can show his teeth, you know, and look as bitter as you like. It ain't off, because when I just named the very heavy figure in such a business as ours,—he only snarled. But it ain't on, Mr. Moggs. It ain't what I call,—on." After this they walked on in silence for a short way, when Mr. Waddle made a little proposition. "He's on your books, too, Mr. Moggs, pretty tight, as I'm told. Why ain't you down on him?"

"Down on him?" said Moggs.

"I wouldn't leave him an hour, if I was you."

"D' you think that's the way I would be down on,—a rival?" and Moggs, as he walked along, worked both his fists closely in his energy. "If I can't be down on him other gait than that, I'll leave him alone. But, Waddle, by my sacred honour as a man, I'll not leave him alone!" Waddle started, and stood with his mouth open, looking up at his friend. "Base,

mercenary, false-hearted loon! What is it that he wants?"

"Old Neefit's money. That's it, you know."

"He doesn't know what love means, and he'd take that fair creature, and drag her through the dirt, and subject her to the scorn of hardened aristocrats, and crush her spirits, and break her heart,—just because her father has scraped together a mass of gold. But I,—I wouldn't let the wind blow on her too harshly. I despise her father's money. I love her. Yes;—I'll be down upon him somehow. Good-night, Waddle. To come between me and the pride of my heart for a little dirt! Yes; I'll be down upon him." Waddle stood and admired. He had read of such things in books, but here it was brought home to him in absolute life. He had a young wife whom he loved, but there had been no poetry about his marriage. One didn't often come across real poetry in the world,—Waddle felt;—but when one did, the treat was great. Now Ontario Moggs was full of poetry. When he preached rebellion it was very grand,—though at such moments Waddle was apt to tell himself that he was precluded by his two kids from taking an active share in such poetry as that. But when Moggs was roused to speak of his love, poetry couldn't go beyond that. "He'll drop into that customer of ours," said Waddle to himself, "and he'll mean it when he's adoing of it. But Polly 'll never 'ave 'im." And then there came across Waddle's mind an idea which he could not express,—that of course no girl would put up with a bootmaker who could have a real gentleman. Real gentlemen think a good deal of themselves, but not

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half so much as is thought of them by men who know that they themselves are of a different order.

Ontario Moggs, as he went homewards by himself, was disturbed by various thoughts. If it really was to be the case that Polly Neefit wouldn't have him, why should he stay in a country so ill-adapted to his manner of thinking as this? Why remain in a paltry island while all the starry west, with its brilliant promises, was open to him? Here he could only quarrel with his father, and become a rebel, and perhaps live to find himself in a jail. And then what could he do of good? He preached and preached, but nothing came of it. Would not the land of the starry we suit better such a heart and such a mind as his? But he wouldn't stir while his fate was as yet unfixed in reference to Polly Neefit. Strikes were dear to him, and oratory, and the noisy applauses of the Cheshire Cheese; but nothing was so dear to him as Polly Neefit. He went about the world with a great burden lying on his chest, and that burden was his love for Polly Neefit. In regard to strikes and the ballot he did in a certain way reason within himself and teach himself to believe that he had thought out those matters; but as to Polly he thought not at all. He simply loved her, and felt himself to be a wild, frantic man, quarrelling with his father, hurrying towards jails and penal settlements, rushing about the streets half disposed to suicide, because Polly Neefit would have none of him. He had been jealous, too, of the gasfitter, when he had seen his Polly whirling round the room in the gasfitter's arms;—but the gasfitter was no gentleman, and the battle had been even. In spite of the whirling he still had a chance against the gasfitter.

But the introduction of the purple and fine linen element into his affairs was maddening to him. With all his scorn for gentry, Ontario Moggs in his heart feared a gentleman. He thought that he could make an effort to punch Ralph Newton's head if they two were ever to be brought together in a spot convenient for such an operation; but of the man's standing in the world, he was afraid. It seemed to him to be impossible that Polly should prefer him, or any one of his class, to a suitor whose hands were always clean, whose shirt was always white, whose words were soft and well-chosen, who carried with him none of the stain of work. Moggs was as true as steel in his genuine love of Labour,—of Labour with a great L, —of the People with a great P,—of Tradewith a great T,—of Commerce with a great C; but of himself individually,—of himself, who was a man of the people, and a tradesman, he thought very little when he compared himself to a gentleman. He could not speak as they spoke; he could not walk as they walked; he could not eat as they ate. There was a divinity about a gentleman which he envied and hated.

Now, Polly Neefit was not subject to this idolatry. Could Moggs have read her mind, he might have known that success, as from the bootmaker against the gentleman, was by no means so hopeless an affair. What Polly liked was a nice young man, who would hold up his head and be true to her,—and who would not make a fool of himself. If he could waltz into the bargain, that also would Polly like.

On that night Ontario walked all the way out to Alexandrina Cottage, and spent an hour leaning upon the gate, looking up at the window of the breeches-maker's

bed-room;—for the chamber of Polly herself opened backwards. When he had stood there an hour, he walked home to Bond Street.

CHAPTER XVII.

Ralph Newton's Doubts.

THAT month of August was a very sad time indeed for Ralph the heir. With him all months were, we may say, idle months; but, as a rule, August was of all the most idle. Sometimes he would affect to shoot grouse, but hunting, not grouse-shooting, was his passion as a sportsman. He would leave London, and spend perhaps a couple of days with Mr. Horsball looking at the nags. Then he would run down to some sea-side place, and flirt and laugh and waste his time upon the sands. Or he would go abroad as far as Dieppe, or perhaps Biarritz, and so would saunter through the end of the summer. It must not be supposed of him that he was not fully conscious that this manner of life was most pernicious. He knew it well, knew that it would take him to the dogs, made faint resolves at improvement which he hardly for an hour hoped to be able to keep,—and was in truth anything but happy. This was his usual life;—and so for the last three or four years had he contrived to get through this month of August. But now the utmost sternness of business had come upon him. He was forced to remain in town, found himself sitting day after day in his lawyer's anteroom, was compelled to seek various interviews with Sir Thomas, in which it was impossible that Sir Thomas should make himself very pleasant; and,—

worst of all,—was at last told that he must make up his own mind!

Squire Newton was also up in London; and though London was never much to his taste, he was in these days by no means so wretched as his nephew. He was intent on a certain object, and he began to hope, nay to think, that his object might be achieved. He had not once seen his nephew, having declared his conviction very strongly that it would be better for all parties that they should remain apart. His own lawyer he saw frequently, and Ralph's lawyer once, and Sir Thomas more than once or twice. There was considerable delay, but the Squire would not leave London till something was, if not settled, at any rate arranged, towards a settlement. And it was the expression of his will conveyed through the two lawyers which kept Ralph in London. What was the worth of Ralph's interest in the property? That was one great question. Would Ralph sell that interest when the price was fixed? That was the second question. Ralph, to whom the difficulty of giving an answer was as a labour of Hercules, staved off the evil day for awhile by declaring that he must know what was the price before he could say whether he would sell the article. The exact price could not be fixed. The lawyers combined in saying that the absolute sum of money to include all Ralph's interest in the estate could not be named that side of Christmas. It was not to be thought of that any actuary, or valuer, or lawyer, or conveyancer, should dispose of so great a matter by a month's work. But something approaching to a settlement might be made. A sum might be named as a minimum. And a compact might be made, subject to the arbitration

of a sworn appraiser. A sum was named. The matter was carried so far, that Ralph was told that he could sign away all his rights by the middle of September, —sign away the entire property,—and have his pockets filled with ample funds for the Moonbeam, and all other delights. He might pay off Moggs and Neefit, and no longer feel that Polly,—poor dear Polly,—was a mill-stone round his neck. And he would indeed in this event be so well provided, that he did not for a moment doubt that, if he chose so to circumscribe himself, Clarissa Underwood might be his wife. All the savings of the Squire's life would be his,—enough, as the opposing lawyer told him, with eager pressing words, to give him an estate of over a thousand a year at once. "And it may be more,—probably will be more," said the lawyer. But at the very least a sum approaching to thirty thousand pounds would be paid over to him at once. And he might do what he pleased with this. There was still a remnant of his own paternal property sufficient to pay his debts.

But why should a man whose encumbrances were so trifling, sacrifice prospects that were so glorious? Could he not part with a portion of the estate,—with the reversion of half of it, so that the house of Newton, Newton Priory, with its grouse and paddocks and adjacent farms, might be left to him? If the whole were saleable, surely so also must be the half. The third of the money offered to him would more than suffice for all his wants. No doubt he might sell the half,—but not to the Squire, nor could he effect such sale immediately as he would do if the Squire bought it, nor on such terms as were offered by the Squire. Money he might raise at once, certainly; but it became

by degrees as a thing certain to him, that if once he raised money in that way, the estate would fly from him. His uncle was a hale man, and people told him that his own life was not so much better than his uncle's. His uncle had a great object, and if Ralph chose to sell at all, that fact would be worth thousands to him. But his uncle would not buy the reversion of half or of a portion of the property. The Squire at last spoke his mind freely on this matter to Sir Thomas. "It shall never be cast in my son's teeth," he said, "that his next neighbour is the real man. Early in life I made a mistake, and I have had to pay for it ever since. I am paying for it now, and must pay for it to the end. But my paying for it will be of small service if my boy has to pay for it afterwards." Sir Thomas understood him and did not press the point.

Ralph was nearly driven wild with the need of deciding. Moggs's bill at two months was coming due, and he knew that he could expect no mercy there. To Neefit's establishment in Conduit Street he had gone once, and had had words,—as Waddle had told to his rival. Neefit was still persistent in his wishes,—still urgent that Newton should go forth to Hendon like a man, and "pop" at once. "I'll tell you what, Captain," said he;—he had taken to calling Ralph Captain, as a goodly familiar name, feeling, no doubt, that Mister was cold between father-in-law and son-in-law, and not quite daring to drop all reverential title;—"if you're a little hard up, as I know you are, you can have three or four hundred if you want it." Ralph did want it sorely. "I know how you stand with old Moggs," said Neefit, "and I'll see you all right there." Neefit was very urgent. He too had heard something of these

dealings among the lawyers. To have his Polly Mrs. Newton of Newton Priory! The prize was worth fighting for. "Don't let them frighten you about a little ready money, Captain. If it comes to that, other folk has got ready money besides them."

"Your trust in me surprises me," said Ralph. "I already owe you money which I can't pay you."

"I know where to trust, and I know where not to trust. If you'll once say as how you'll pop the question to Polly, fair and honest, on the square, you shall have five hundred;—bless me, if you shan't. If she don't take you after all, why then I must look for my money by-and-by. If you're on the square with me, Captain, you'll never find me hard to deal with."

"I hope I shall be on the square, at any rate."

"Then you step out to her and pop." Hereupon Ralph made a long and intricate explanation of his affairs, the object of which was to prove to Mr. Neefit that a little more delay was essential. He was so environed by business and difficulties at the present moment that he could take no immediate step such as Mr. Neefit suggested,—no such step quite immediately. In about another fortnight, or in a month at the furthest, he would be able to declare his purpose. "And how about Moggs?" said Neefit, putting his hands into his breeches-pocket, pulling down the corners of his mouth, and fixing his saucer eyes full upon the young man's face. So he stood for some seconds, and then came the words of which Waddle had spoken. Neefit could not disentangle the intricacies of Ralph's somewhat fictitious story; but he had wit enough to know what it meant. "You ain't on the square, Captain. That's what you ain't," he said at last. It must be owned

that the accusation was just, and it was made so loudly that Waddle did not at all exaggerate in saying that there had been words. Nevertheless, when Ralph left the shop Neefit relented. "You come to me, Captain, when Moggs's bit of stiff comes round."

A few days after that Ralph went to Sir Thomas, with the object of declaring his decision;—at least, Sir Thomas understood that such was to be the purport of the visit. According to his ideas there had been quite enough of delay. The Squire had been liberal in his offer; and though the thing to be sold was in all its bearings so valuable, though it carried with it a value which, in the eyes of Sir Thomas,—and, indeed, in the eyes of all Englishmen,—was far beyond all money price, though the territorial position was, for a legitimate heir, almost a principality; yet, when a man cannot keep a thing, what can he do but part with it? Ralph had made his bed, and he must lie upon it. Sir Thomas had done what he could, but it had all amounted to nothing. There was this young man a beggar,—but for this reversion which he had now the power of selling. As for that mode of extrication by marrying the breeches-maker's daughter,—that to Sir Thomas was infinitely the worst evil of the two. Let Ralph accept his uncle's offer and he would still be an English gentleman, free to live as such, free to marry as such, free to associate with friends fitting to his habit of life. And he would be a gentleman, too, with means sufficing for a gentleman's wants. But that escape by way of the breeches-maker's daughter would, in accordance with Sir Thomas's view of things, destroy everything.

"Well, Ralph," he said, sighing, almost groaning,

as his late ward took the now accustomed chair opposite to his own.

"I wish I'd never been born," said Ralph, "and that Gregory stood in my place."

"But you have been born, Ralph. We must take things as we find them." Then there was a long silence. "I think, you know, that you should make up your mind one way or the other. Your uncle of course feels that as he is ready to pay the money at once he is entitled to an immediate answer."

"I don't see that at all," said Ralph. "I am under no obligation to my uncle, and I don't see why I am to be bustled by him. He is doing nothing for my sake."

"He has, at any rate, the power of retracting."

"Let him retract."

"And then you'll be just where you were before, ready to fall into the hands of the Jews. If you must part with your property you cannot do so on better terms."

"It seems to me that I shall be selling £7,000 a year in land for about £1,200 a year in the funds."

"Just so;—that's about it, I suppose. But can you tell me when the land will be yours,—or whether it will ever be yours at all? What is it that you have got to sell? But, Ralph, it is no good going over all that again."

"I know that, Sir Thomas."

"I had hoped you would have come to some decision. If you can save the property of course you ought to do so. If you can live on what pittance is left to you——"

"I can save it."

"Then do save it."

"I can save it by—marrying."

"By selling yourself to the daughter of a man who makes —— breeches! I can give you advice on no other point; but I do advise you not to do that. I look upon an ill-assorted marriage as the very worst kind of ruin. I cannot myself conceive any misery greater than that of having a wife whom I could not ask my friends to meet."

Ralph when he heard this blushed up to the roots of his hair. He remembered that when he had first mentioned to Sir Thomas his suggested marriage with Polly Neefit he had said that as regarded Polly herself, he thought that Patience and Clarissa would not object to her. He was now being told by Sir Thomas himself that his daughters would certainly not consent to meet Polly Neefit, should Polly Neefit become Mrs. Newton. He, too, had his ideas of his own standing in the world, and had not been slow to assure himself that the woman whom he might choose for his wife would be a fit companion for any lady,—as long as the woman was neither vicious nor disagreeable. He could make any woman a lady; he could, at any rate, make Polly Neefit a lady. He rose from his seat, and prepared to leave the room in disgust.

"I won't trouble you by coming here again," he said.

"You are welcome, Ralph," said Sir Thomas. "If I could assist you, you would be doubly welcome."

"I know I have been a great trouble to you,—a thankless, fruitless, worthless trouble. I shall make up my mind, no doubt, in a day or two, and I will just

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"He has, at any rate, the power of retracting."

"Let him retract."

"And then you'll be just where you were before, ready to fall into the hands of the Jews. If you must part with your property you cannot do so on better terms."

"It seems to me that I shall be selling £7,000 a year in land for about £1,200 a year in the funds."

"Just so;—that's about it, I suppose. But can you tell me when the land will be yours,—or whether it will ever be yours at all? What is it that you have got to sell? But, Ralph, it is no good going over all that again."

"I know that, Sir Thomas."

"I had hoped you would have come to some decision. If you can save the property of course you ought to do so. If you can live on what pittance is left to you——"

"I can save it."

"Then do save it."

"I can save it by—marrying."

"By selling yourself to the daughter of a man who makes —— breeches! I can give you advice on no other point; but I do advise you not to do that. I look upon an ill-assorted marriage as the very worst kind of ruin. I cannot myself conceive any misery greater than that of having a wife whom I could not ask my friends to meet."

Ralph when he heard this blushed up to the roots of his hair. He remembered that when he had first mentioned to Sir Thomas his suggested marriage with Polly Neefit he had said that as regarded Polly herself, he thought that Patience and Clarissa would not object to her. He was now being told by Sir Thomas himself that his daughters would certainly not consent to meet Polly Neefit, should Polly Neefit become Mrs. Newton. He, too, had his ideas of his own standing in the world, and had not been slow to assure himself that the woman whom he might choose for his wife would be a fit companion for any lady,—as long as the woman was neither vicious nor disagreeable. He could make any woman a lady; he could, at any rate, make Polly Neefit a lady. He rose from his seat, and prepared to leave the room in disgust.

"I won't trouble you by coming here again," he said.

"You are welcome, Ralph," said Sir Thomas. "If I could assist you, you would be doubly welcome."

"I know I have been a great trouble to you,—a thankless, fruitless, worthless trouble. I shall make up my mind, no doubt, in a day or two, and I will just

write you a line. I need not bother you by coming any more. Of course I think a great deal about it."

"No doubt," said Sir Thomas.

"Unluckily I have been brought up to know the value of what it is I have to throw away. It is a kind of thing that a man doesn't do without some regrets."

"They should have come earlier," said Sir Thomas.

"No doubt;—but they didn't, and it is no use saying anything more about it. Good-day, sir." Then he flounced out of the room, impatient of that single word of rebuke which had been administered to him.

Sir Thomas, as soon as he was alone, applied himself at once to the book which he had reluctantly put aside when he was disturbed. But he could not divest his mind of its trouble, as quickly as his chamber had been divested of the presence of its troubler. He had said an ill-natured word, and that grieved him. And then,—was he not taking all this great matter too easily? If he would only put his shoulder to the wheel thoroughly might he not do something to save this friend,—this lad, who had been almost as his own son,—from destruction? Would it not be a burden on his conscience to the last day of his life that he had allowed his ward to be ruined, when by some sacrifice of his own means he might have saved him. He sat and thought of it, but did not really resolve that anything could be done. He was wont to think in the same way of his own children, whom he neglected. His conscience had been pricking him all his life, but it hardly pricked him sharp enough to produce consequences.

During those very moments in which Ralph was leaving Southampton Buildings he had almost made

up his mind to go at once to Alexandrina Cottage, and to throw himself and the future fate of Newton Priory at the feet of Polly Neefit. Two incidents in his late interview with Sir Thomas tended to drive him that way. Sir Thomas had told him that should he marry the daughter of a man who made —— breeches, no lady would associate with his wife. Sir Thomas also had seemed to imply that he must sell his property. He would show Sir Thomas that he could have a will and a way of his own. Polly Neefit should become his wife; and he would show the world that no proudest lady in the land was treated with more delicate consideration by her husband than the breeches-maker's daughter should be treated by him. And when it should please Providence to decide that the present squire of Newton had reigned long enough over that dominion, he would show the world that he had known something of his own position and the value of his own prospects. Then Polly should be queen in the Newton dominions, and he would see whether the ordinary world of worshippers would not come and worship as usual. All the same, he did not on that occasion go out to Alexandrina Cottage.

When he reached his club he found a note from his brother.

"Newton Peele, September 8th, 186—.

"MY DEAR RALPH,

"I have been sorry not to have had an answer from you to the letter which I wrote to you about a month ago. Of course I hear of what is going on. Ralph Newton up at the house tells me everything. The Squire is still in town, as, of course, you know;

and there has got to be a report about here that he has, as the people say, bought you out. I still hope that this is not true. The very idea of it is terrible to me;—that you should sell for an old song, as it were, the property that has belonged to us for centuries! It would not, indeed, go out of the name, but, as far as you and I are concerned, that is the same. I will not refuse, myself, to do anything that you may say is necessary to extricate yourself from embarrassment; but I can hardly bring myself to believe that a step so fatal as this can be necessary.

"If I understand the matter rightly, your difficulty is not so much in regard to debts as in the want of means of livelihood. If so, can you not bring yourself to live quietly for a term of years. Of course you ought to marry, and there may be a difficulty there; but almost anything would be better than abandoning the property. As I told you before, you are welcome to the use of the whole of my share of the London property. It is very nearly £400 a year. Could you not live on that till things come round?

"Our cousin Ralph knows that I am writing to you, and knows what my feelings are. It is not he that is so anxious for the purchase. Pray write and tell me what is to be done.

"Most affectionately yours,

"GREGORY NEWTON.

"I wouldn't lose a day in doing anything you might direct about the Holborn property."

Ralph received this at his club, and afterwards dined alone, considering it. Before the evening was

over he thought that he had made up his mind that he would not, under any circumstances, give up his reversionary right. "They couldn't make me do it, even though I went to prison," he said to himself. Let him starve till he died, and then the property would go to Gregory! What did it matter? The thing that did matter was this,—that the estate should not be allowed to depart out of the true line of the Newton family. He sat thinking of it half the night, and before he left the club he wrote the following note to his brother:—

"September 9th, 186—.

"DEAR GREG.,

"Be sure of this,—that I will not part with my interest in the property. I do not think that I can be forced, and I will never do it willingly. It may be that I may be driven to take advantage of your liberality and prudence. If so, I can only say that you shall share the property with me when it comes.

"Yours always,

"R. N."

This he gave to the porter of the club as he passed out; and then, as he went home, he acknowledged to himself that it was tantamount to a decision on his part that he would forthwith marry Polly Neefit.

CHAPTER XVIII.

We won't sell Brownriggs.

On the 10th of September the Squire was informed that Ralph Newton demanded another ten days for his decision, and that he had undertaken to communicate it by letter on the 20th. The Squire had growled, thinking that his nephew was unconscionable, and had threatened to withdraw his offer. The lawyer, with a smile, assured him that the matter really was progressing very quickly, that things of that kind could rarely be carried on so expeditiously; and that, in short, Mr. Newton had no fair ground of complaint. "When a man pays through the nose for his whistle, he ought to get it!" said the Squire, plainly showing that his idea as to the price fixed was very different from that entertained by his nephew. But he did not retract his offer. He was too anxious to accomplish the purchase to do that. He would go home, he said, and wait till the 20th. Then he would return to London. And he did go home.

On the first evening he said very little to his son. He felt that his son did not quite sympathize with him, and he was sore that it should be so. He could not be angry with his son. He knew well that this want of sympathy arose from a conviction on this son's part that, let what might be done in regard to the property, nothing could make him, who was illegitimate, capable of holding the position in the country which of right belonged to Newton of Newton. But the presence of this feeling in the mind of the son was an accusation against himself which was very grievous to him. Almost every act of his latter life had been

done with the object of removing the cause for such accusation. To make his boy such as he would have been in every respect had not his father sinned in his youth, had been the one object of the father's life. And nobody gainsayed him in this but that son himself. Nobody told him that all his bother about the estate was of no avail. Nobody dared to tell him so. Parson Gregory, in his letters to his brother, could express such an opinion. Sir Thomas, sitting alone in his chamber, could feel it. Ralph, the legitimate heir, with an assumed scorn, could declare to himself that, let what might be sold, he would still be Newton of Newton. The country people might know it, and the farmers might whisper it one to another. But nobody said a word of this to the Squire. His own lawyer never alluded to such a matter, though it was of course in his thoughts. Nevertheless, the son, whom he loved so well, would tell him from day to day,—indirectly, indeed, but with words that were plain enough,—that the thing was not to be done. Men and women called him Newton, because his father had chosen so to call him;—as they would have called him Tomkins or Montmorenci, had he first appeared before them with either of those names; but he was not a Newton, and nothing could make him Newton of Newton Priory,—not even the possession of the whole parish, and an habitation in the Priory itself. "I wish you wouldn't think about it," the son would say to the father;—and the expression of such a wish would contain the whole accusation. What other son would express a desire that the father would abstain from troubling himself to leave his estate entire to his child?

On the morning after his return the necessary communication was made. But it was not commenced in any set form. The two were out together, as was usual with them, and were on the road which divided the two parishes, Bostock from Newton. On the left of them was Walker's farm, called the Brownriggs; and on the right, Darvell's farm, which was in their own peculiar parish of Newton. "I was talking to Darvell while you were away," said Ralph.

"What does he say for himself?"

"Nothing. It's the old story. He wants to stay, though he knows he'd be better away."

"Then let him stay. Only I must have the place made fit to look at. A man should have a chance of pulling through."

"Certainly, sir. I don't want him to go. I was only thinking it would be better for his children that there should be a change. As for making the place fit to look at, he hasn't the means. It's Walker's work, at the other side, that shames him."

"One can't have Walkers on every farm," said the Squire. "No;—if things go, as I think they will go, we'll pull down every stick and stone at Brumby's,"—Brumby's was the name of Darvell's farm, "and put it up all ship-shape. The house hasn't been touched these twenty years." Ralph said nothing. He knew well that his father would not talk of building unless he intended to buy before he built. Nothing could be more opposed to the Squire's purposes in life than the idea of building a house, which, at his death, would become the property of his nephew. And, in this way, the estate was being starved. All this Ralph understood thoroughly; and, understanding it, had

frequently expressed a desire that his father and the heir could act in accord together. But now the Squire talked of pulling down and building up as though the property were his own, to do as he liked with it. "And I think I can do it without selling Brownriggs," continued the Squire. "When it came to black and white, the value that he has in it doesn't come to so much as I thought." Still Ralph said nothing,—nothing, at least, as to the work that had been done up in London. He merely made some observation as to Darvell's farm;—suggesting that a clear half year's rent should be given to the man. "I have pretty well arranged it all in my mind," continued the Squire. "We could part with Twining. It don't lie so near as Brownriggs."

Ralph felt that it would be necessary that he should say something. "Lord Fitzadam would be only too glad to buy it. He owns every acre in the parish except Ingram's farm."

"There'll be no difficulty about selling it,—when we have the power to sell. It'll fetch thirty years' purchase. I'd give thirty years' purchase for it, at the present rent, myself, if I had the money. Lord Fitzadam shall have it, if he pleases, of course. There's four hundred acres of it."

"Four hundred and nine," said Ralph.

"And it's worth over twelve thousand pounds. It would have gone against the grain with me to part with any of the land in Bostock; but I think we can squeeze through without that."

"Is it arranged, sir?" asked the son at last.

"Well;—no; I can't say it is. He is to give me his answer on the 20th. But I cannot see that he

has any alternative. He must pay his debts, and he has no other way of paying them. He must live, and he has nothing else to live on. A fellow like that will have money, if he can lay his hands on it, and he can't lay his hands on it elsewhere. Of course he could get money; but he couldn't get it on such terms as I have offered him. He is to have down thirty thousand pounds, and then,—after that,—I am to pay him whatever more than that they may think the thing is worth to him. Under no circumstances is he to have less. It's a large sum of money, Ralph."

"Yes, indeed;—though not so much as you had expected, sir."

"Well,—no; but then there are drawbacks. However, I shall only be too glad to have it settled. I don't think, Ralph, you have ever realized what it has been for me not to be able to lay out a shilling on the property, as to which I was not satisfied that I should see it back again in a year or two."

"And yet, sir, I have thought much about it."

"Thought! By heavens, I have thought of nothing else. As I stand here, the place has hardly been worth the having to me, because of such thinking. Your uncle, from the very first, was determined to make it bitter enough. I shall never forget his coming to me when I cut down the first tree. Was I going to build houses for a man's son who begrudged me the timber I wanted about the place?"

"He couldn't stop you there."

"But he said he could,—and he tried. And if I wanted to change a thing here or there, was it pleasant, do you think, to have to go to him? And what pleasure could there be in doing anything when an-

other was to have it all? But you have never understood it, Ralph. Well;—I hope you'll understand it some day. If this goes right, nobody shall ever stop you in cutting a tree. You shall be free to do what you please with every sod, and every branch, and every wall, and every barn. I shall be happy at last, Ralph, if I think that you can enjoy it." Then there was again a silence, for tears were in the eyes both of the father and of the son. "Indeed," continued the Squire, as he rubbed the moisture away, "my great pleasure, while I remain, will be to see you active about the place. As it is now, how is it possible that you should care for it?"

"But I do care for it, and I think I am active about it."

"Yes,—making money for that idiot, who is to come after me. But I don't think he ever will come. I dare say he won't be ashamed to shoot your game and drink your claret, if you'll allow him. For the matter of that, when the thing is settled he may come and drink my wine if he pleases. I'll be his loving uncle then, if he don't object. But as it is now;—as it has been, I couldn't have borne him."

Even yet there had been no clear statement as to what had been done between father and son. There was so much of clinging, trusting, perfect love in the father's words towards the son, that the latter could not bear to say a word that should produce sorrow. When the Squire declared that Ralph should have it all, free—to do just as he pleased with it, with all the full glory of ownership, Ralph could not bring himself to throw a doubt upon the matter. And yet he did doubt;—more than doubted;—felt almost certain that

his father was in error. While his father had remained alone up in town he had been living with Gregory, and had known what Gregory thought and believed. He had even seen his namesake's letter to Gregory, in which it was positively stated that the reversion would not be sold. Throughout the morning the Squire went on speaking of his hopes, and saying that this and that should be done the very moment that the contract was signed; at last Ralph spoke out, when, on some occasion, his father reproached him for indifference. "I do so fear that you will be disappointed," he said.

"Why should I be disappointed?"

"It is not for my own sake that I fear, for in truth the arrangement, as it stands, is no bar to my enjoyment of the place."

"It is a most absolute bar to mine," said the Squire.

"I fear it is not settled."

"I know that;—but I see no reason why it should not be settled. Do you know any reason?"

"Gregory feels sure that his brother will never consent."

"Gregory is all very well. Gregory is the best fellow in the world. Had Gregory been in his brother's place I shouldn't have had a chance. But Gregory knows nothing about this kind of thing, and Gregory doesn't in the least understand his brother."

"But Ralph has told him so."

"Ralph will say anything. He doesn't mind what lies he tells."

"I think you are too hard on him," said the son.

"Well; we shall see. But what is it that Ralph has

said? And when did he say it?" Then the son told the father of the short letter which the parson had received from his brother, and almost repeated the words of it. And he told the date of the letter, only a day or two before the Squire's return. "Why the mischief could he not be honest enough to tell me the same thing, if he had made up his mind?" said the Squire, angrily. "Put it how you will, he is lying either to me or to his brother;—probably to both of us. His word either on one side or on the other is worth nothing. I believe he will take my money because he wants money, and because he likes money. As for what he says, it is worth nothing. When he has once written his name, he cannot go back from it, and there will be comfort in that." Ralph said nothing more. His father had talked himself into a passion, and was quite capable of becoming angry, even with him. So he suggested something about the shooting for next day, and proposed that the parson should be asked to join them. "He may come if he likes," said the Squire, "but I give you my word if this goes on much longer, I shall get to dislike even the sight of him." On that very day the parson dined with them, and early in the evening the Squire was cold, and silent, and then snappish. But he warmed afterwards under the double influence of his own port-wine, and the thorough sweetness of his nephew's manner. His last words as Gregory left him that night in the hall were as follows:—"Bother about the church. I'm half sick of the church. You come and shoot to-morrow. Don't let us have any new fads about not shooting."

"There are no new fads, Uncle Greg., and I'll be with you by twelve o'clock," said the parson.

"He is very good as parsons go," said the Squire, as he shut the door.

"He's as good as gold," said the Squire's son.

CHAPTER XIX.

Polly's Answer.

Moggs's bill became due before the 20th of September, and Ralph Newton received due notice,—as of course he had known that he would do,—that it had not been cashed at his banker's. How should it be cashed at his banker's, seeing that he had not had a shilling there for the last three months? Moggs himself, Moggs senior, came to Ralph, and made himself peculiarly disagreeable. He had never heard of such a thing on the part of a gentleman! Not to have his bill taken up! To have his paper dishonoured! Moggs spoke of it as though the heavens would fall; and he spoke of it, too, as though, even should the heavens not fall, the earth would be made a very tumultuous and unpleasant place for Mr. Newton, if Mr. Newton did not see at once that these two hundred and odd pounds were forthcoming. Moggs said so much that Ralph became very angry, turned him out of the room, and told him that he should have his dirty money on the morrow. On the morrow the dirty money was paid, Ralph having borrowed the amount from Mr. Neefit. Mr. Moggs was quite content. His object had been achieved, and, when the cash was paid, he was quite polite. But Ralph Newton was not happy as he made the payment. He had declared to himself, after writing that letter to his brother, that the thing was settled by the very declaration made by

him therein. When he assured his brother that he would not sell his interest in the property, he did, in fact, resolve that he would make Polly Neefit his wife. And he did no more than follow up that resolution when he asked Neefit for a small additional advance. His due would not be given to the breeches-maker, if it were not acknowledged that on this occasion he behaved very well. He had told Ralph to come to him when Moggs's "bit of stiff" came round. Moggs's "bit of stiff" did come round, and "the Captain" did as he had been desired to do. Neefit wrote out the cheque without saying a word about his daughter. "Do you just run across to Argyle Street, Captain," said the breeches-maker, "and get the stuff in notes." For Mr. Neefit's bankers held an establishment in Argyle Street. "There ain't no need, you know, to let on, Captain, is there?" said the breeches-maker. Ralph Newton, clearly seeing that there was no need to "let on," did as he was bid, and so the account was settled with Mr. Moggs. But now as to settling the account with Mr. Neefit? Neefit had his own idea of what was right between gentlemen. As the reader knows, he could upon an occasion make his own views very clearly intelligible. He was neither reticent nor particularly delicate. But there was something within him which made him give the cheque to Ralph without a word about Polly. That something, let it be what it might, was not lost upon Ralph.

Any further doubt on his part was quite out of the question. If his mind had not been made up before, it must, at least, be made up now. He had twice borrowed Mr. Neefit's money, and on this latter occasion had taken it on the express understanding that

he was to propose to Mr. Neefit's daughter. And then, in this way, and in this way only, he could throw over his uncle and save the property. As soon as he had paid the money to Moggs, he went to his room and dressed himself for the occasion. As he arranged his dress with some small signs of an intention to be externally smart, he told himself that it signified nothing at all, that the girl was only a breeches-maker's daughter, and that there was hardly a need that he should take a new pair of gloves for such an occasion as this. In that he was probably right. An old pair of gloves would have done just as well, though Polly did like young men to look smart.

He went out in a hansom of course. A man does not become economical because he is embarrassed. And as for embarrassment, he need not trouble himself with any further feelings on that score. When once he should be the promised husband of Polly Neefit, he would have no scruple about the breeches-maker's money. Why should he, when he did the thing with the very view of getting it? They couldn't expect him to be married till next spring at the earliest, and he would take another winter out of himself at the Moonbeam. As the sacrifice was to be made he might as well enjoy all that would come of the sacrifice. Then as he sat in the cab he took to thinking whether, after any fashion at all, he did love Polly Neefit. And from that he got to thinking,—not of poor Clary,—but of Mary Bonner. If his uncle could at once be translated to his fitting place among the immortals, oh, —what a life might be his! But his uncle was still mortal, and,—after all,—Polly Neefit was a very jolly girl.

When he got to the house he asked boldly for Miss Neefit. He had told himself that no repulse could be injurious to him. If Mrs. Neefit were to refuse him admission into the house, the breeches-maker would be obliged to own that he had done his best. But there was no repulse. In two minutes he found himself in the parlour, with Polly standing up to receive him.

"Dear me, Mr. Newton; how odd! You might have come weeks running before you'd find me here and mother out. She's gone to fetch father home. She don't do it,—not once a month." Ralph assured her that he was quite contented as it was, and that he did not in the least regret the absence of Mrs. Neefit. "But she'll be ever so unhappy. She likes to see gentlemen when they call."

"And you dislike it?" asked Ralph.

"Indeed I don't then," said Polly.

And now in what way was he to do it? Would it be well to allude to her father's understanding with himself? In the ordinary way of love-making Ralph was quite as much at home as another. He had found no difficulty in saying a soft word to Clarissa Underwood, and in doing more than that. But with Polly the matter was different. There was an inappropriateness in his having to do the thing at all, which made it difficult to him,—unless he could preface what he did by an allusion to his agreement with her father. He could hardly ask Polly to be his wife without giving her some reason for the formation of so desperate a wish on his own part. "Polly," he said at last, "that was very awkward for us all,—that evening when Mr. Moggs was here."

"Indeed it was, Mr. Newton. Poor Mr. Moggs! He shouldn't have stayed;—but mother asked him."

"Has he been here since?"

"He was then, and he and I were walking together. There isn't a better fellow breathing than Ontario Moggs—in his own way. But he's not company for you, Mr. Newton, of course."

Ralph quailed at this. To be told that his own boot-maker wasn't "company" for him,—and that by the young lady whom he intended to make his wife! "I don't think he is company for you either, Polly," he said.

"Why not, Mr. Newton? He's as good as me. What's the difference between him and father?" He wondered whether, when she should be his own, he would be able to teach her to call Mr. Neefit her papa. "Mr. Newton, when you know me better, you'll know that I'm not one to give myself airs. I've known Mr. Moggs all my life, and he's equal to me, anyways,—only he's a deal better."

"I hope there's nothing more than friendship, Polly."

"What business have you to hope?"

Upon that theme he spoke, and told her in plain language that his reason for so hoping was that he trusted to be able to persuade her to become his own wife. Polly, when the word was spoken, blushed ruby red, and trembled a little. The thing had come to her, and, after all, she might be a real lady if she pleased. She blushed ruby red, and trembled, but she said not a word for a while. And then, having made his offer, he began to speak of love. In speaking of it, he was urgent enough, but his words had not that

sort of suasiveness which they would have possessed had he been addressing himself to Clary Underwood. "Polly," he said, "I hope you can love me. I will love you very dearly, and do all that I can to make you happy. To me you shall be the first woman in the world. Do you think that you can love me, Polly?"

Polly was, perhaps, particular. She had not quite approved of the manner in which Ontario had disclosed his love, though there had been something of the eloquence of passion even in that;—and now she was hardly satisfied with Ralph Newton. She had formed to herself, perhaps, some idea of a soft, insinuating, coaxing whisper, something that should be half caress and half prayer, but something that should at least be very gentle and very loving. Ontario was loving, but he was not gentle. Ralph Newton was gentle, but then she doubted whether he was loving. "Will you say that it shall be so?" he asked, standing over her, and looking down upon her with his most bewitching smile.

Polly amidst her blushing and her trembling made up her mind that she would say nothing of the kind at this present moment. She would like to be a lady though she was not ashamed of being a tradesman's daughter;—but she would not buy the privilege of being a lady at too dear a price. The price would be very high indeed were she to give herself to a man who did not love her, and perhaps despised her. And then she was not quite sure that she could love this man herself, though she was possessed of a facility for liking nice young men. Ralph Newton was well enough in many ways. He was good-looking, he could speak

up for himself, he did not give himself airs,—and then, as she had been fully instructed by her father, he must ultimately inherit a large property. Were she to marry him her position would be absolutely that of one of the ladies of the land. But then she knew,—she could not but know,—that he sought her because he was in want of money for his present needs. To be made a lady of the land would be delightful; but to have a grand passion,—in regard to which Polly would not be satisfied unless there were as much love on one side as on the other,—would be more delightful. That latter was essentially necessary to her. The man must take an absolute pleasure in her company, or the whole thing would be a failure. So she blushed and trembled, and thought and was silent. "Dear Polly, do you mean that you cannot love me?" said Ralph.

"I don't know," said Polly.

"Will you try?" demanded Ralph.

"And I don't know that you can love me."

"Indeed, indeed, I can."

"Ah, yes;—you can say so, I don't doubt. There's a many of them as can say so, and yet it's not in 'em to do it. And there's men as don't know hardly how to say it, and yet it's in their hearts all the while." Polly must have been thinking of Ontario as she made this latter oracular observation.

"I don't know much about saying it; but I can do it, Polly."

"Oh, as for talking, you can talk. You've been brought up that way. You've had nothing else much to do."

She was very hard upon him, and so he felt it. "I think that's not fair, Polly. What can I say to you

better than that I love you, and will be good to you?"

"Oh, good to me! People are always good to me. Why shouldn't they?"

"Nobody will be so good as I will be,—if you will take me. Tell me, Polly, do you not believe me when I say I love you?"

"No;—I don't."

"Why should I be false to you?"

"Ah;—well;—why? It's not for me to say why. Father's been putting you up to this. That's why."

"Your father could put me up to nothing of the kind if it were not that I really loved you."

"And there's another thing, Mr. Newton."

"What's that, Polly?"

"I'm not at all sure that I'm so very fond of you."

"That's unkind."

"Better be true than to rue," said Polly. "Why, Mr. Newton, we don't know anything about each other, —not as yet. I may be, oh, anything bad, for what you know. And for anything I know you may be idle, and extravagant, and a regular man flirt." Polly had a way of speaking the truth without much respect to persons. "And then, Mr. Newton, I'm not going to be given away by father just as he pleases. Father thinks this and that, and he means it all for the best. I love father dearly. But I don't mean to take any body as I don't feel I'd pretty nigh break my heart if I wasn't to have him. I ain't come to breaking my heart for you yet, Mr. Newton."

"I hope you never will break your heart."

"I don't suppose you understand, but that's how

it is. Let it just stand by for a year or so, Mr. Newton, and see how it is then. Maybe we might get to know each other. Just now, marrying you would be like taking a husband out of a lottery." Ralph stood looking at her, passing his hand over his head, and not quite knowing how to carry on his suit. "I'll tell father what you was saying to me and what I said to you," continued Polly, who seemed quite to understand that Ralph had done his duty by his creditor in making the offer, and that justice to him demanded that this should be acknowledged by the whole family.

"And is that to be all, Polly?" asked Ralph in a melancholy voice.

"All at present, Mr. Newton."

Ralph, as he returned to London in his cab, felt more hurt by the girl's refusal of him than he would before have thought to be possible. He was almost disposed to resolve that he would at once renew the siege and carry it on as though there were no question of twenty thousand pounds, and of money borrowed from the breeches-maker. Polly had shown so much spirit in the interview, and had looked so well in showing it, had stood up such a perfect specimen of healthy, comely, honest womanhood, that he thought that he did love her. There was, however, one comfort clearly left to him. He had done his duty by old Neefit. The money due must of course be paid;—but he had in good faith done that which he had pledged himself to do in taking the money.

As to the surrender of the estate, there were still left to him four days in which to think of it.

CHAPTER XX.

The Conservatives of Percycross.

EARLY in this month of September there had come a proposition to Sir Thomas, which had thoroughly disturbed him, and made him for a few days a most miserable man. By the tenth of the month, however, he had so far recovered himself as to have made up his mind in regard to the proposition with some feeling of triumphant expectation. On the following day he went home to Fulham, and communicated his determination to his eldest daughter in the following words; "Patience, I am going to stand for the borough of Percycross."

"Papa!"

"Yes. I dare say I'm a fool for my pains. It will cost me some money which I oughtn't to spend; and if I get in I don't know that I can do any good, or that it can do me any good. I suppose you think I'm very wrong?"

"I am delighted,—and so will Clary be. I'm so much pleased! Why shouldn't you be in Parliament? I have always longed that you should go back to public life, though I have never liked to say so to you."

"It is very kind of you to say it now, my dear."

"And I feel it." There was no doubt of that, for, as she spoke, the tears were streaming from her eyes. "But will you succeed? Is there to be anybody against you?"

"Yes, my dear; there is to be somebody against me. In fact there will be three people against me;

and probably I shall not succeed. Men such as I am do not have seats offered to them without a contest. But there is a chance. I was down at Percycross for two days last week, and now I've put out an address. There it is. Upon which he handed a copy of a placard to his daughter, who read it, no doubt, with more enthusiasm than did any of the free and independent electors to whom it was addressed.

The story in regard to the borough of Percycross was as follows. There were going forward in the country at this moment preparations for a general election, which was to take place in October. The readers of this story have not as yet been troubled on this head, there having been no connection between that great matter and the small matters with which our tale has concerned itself. In the Parliament lately dissolved, the very old borough of Percycross,—or Percy St. Cross, as the place was properly called,—had displayed no political partiality, having been represented by two gentlemen, one of whom always followed the Conservative leader, and the other the Liberal leader, into the respective lobbies of the House of Commons. The borough had very nearly been curtailed of the privilege in regard to two members in the great Reform Bill which had been initiated and perfected and carried through as a whole by the almost unaided intellect and exertions of the great reformer of his age; but it had had its own luck, as the Irishmen say, and had been preserved intact. Now the wise men of Percycross, rejoicing in their salvation, and knowing that there might still be danger before them, should they venture on a contest,—for the bribery had not been unknown in previous contests at Percycross, nor

petitions consequent upon bribery; and some men had marvelled that the borough should have escaped so long; and there was now supposed to be abroad a spirit of assumed virtue in regard to such matters under which Percycross might still be sacrificed if Percycross did not look very sharp after itself;—thinking of all this, the wise men at Percycross had concluded that it would be better, just for the present, to let things run smoothly, and to return their two old members. When the new broom which was to sweep up the dirt of corruption was not quite so new, and they might return to the old game,—which was in truth, a game very much loved in the old town of Percycross. So thought the wise men, and for a while it seemed that the wise men were to have their own way. But there were men at Percycross who were not wise, and who would have it that such an arrangement as this showed lack of spirit. The Conservative foolish men at Percycross began by declaring that they could return two members for the borough if they pleased, and that they would do so, unless this and that were conceded to them. The Liberal foolish men swore that they were ready for the battle. They would concede nothing, and would stand up and fight if the word concession were named to them. They would not only have one member, but would have half the aldermen, half the town-councillors, half the mayor, half the patronage in beadles, bell-ringers and bumbledom in general. Had the great reformer of the age given them household suffrage for nothing? The Liberal foolish men of Percycross declared, and perhaps thought, that they could send two Liberal members to Parliament. And so the borough grew hot. There

was one very learned pundit in those parts, a pundit very learned in political matters, who thus prophesied to one of the proposed candidates;—"You'll spend a thousand pounds in the election. You won't get in, of course, but you'll petition. That'll be another thousand. You'll succeed there, and disfranchise the borough. It will be a great career, and no doubt you'll find it satisfactory. You mustn't show yourself in Percycross afterwards;—that's all." But the spirit was afloat, and the words of the pundit were of no avail. The Liberal spirit had been set a going, and men went to work with the new lists of borough voters. By the end of August it was seen that there must be a contest. But who should be the new candidates?

The old candidates were there,—one on each side: an old Tory and a young Radical. In telling our tale we will not go back to the old sins of the borough, or say aught but good of the past career of the members. Old Mr. Griffenbottom, the Tory, had been very generous with his purse, and was beloved, doubtless, by many in the borough. It is so well for a borough to have some one who is always ready with a fifty-pound note in this or that need! It is so comfortable in a borough to know that it can always have its subscription lists well headed! And the young Radical was popular throughout the county. No one could take a chair at a mechanics' meeting with better grace or more alacrity, or spin out his half hour's speech with greater ease and volubility. And then he was a born gentleman, which is so great a recommendation for a Radical. So that, in fact, young Mr. Westmacott, though he did not spend so much money as old Griffenbottom, was almost as popular in the borough.

There was no doubt about Griffenbottom and Westmacott,—if only the borough would have listened to its wise men and confined itself to the political guardianship of such excellent representatives! But the foolish men prevailed over the wise men, and it was decided that there should be a contest.

It was an evil day for Griffenbottom when it was suggested to him that he should bring a colleague with him. Griffenbottom knew what this meant almost as well as the learned pundit whose words we have quoted. Griffenbottom had not been blessed with uncontested elections, and had run through many perils. He had spent what he was accustomed to call, when speaking of his political position among his really intimate friends, "a treasure" in maintaining the borough. He must often have considered within himself whether his whistle was worth the price. He had petitioned and been petitioned against, and had had evil things said of him, and had gone through the very heat of the fire of political warfare. But he had kept his seat, and now at last,—so he thought,—the ease and comfort of an unopposed return was to repay him for everything. Alas! how all this was changed; how his spirits sank within him, when he received that high-toned letter from his confidential agent, Mr. Trigger, in which he was invited to suggest the name of a colleague! "I'm sure you'll be rejoiced to hear, for the sake of the old borough," said Mr. Trigger, "that we feel confident of carrying the two seats." Could Mr. Trigger have heard the remarks which his patron made on reading that letter, Mr. Trigger would have thought that Mr. Griffenbottom was the most ungrateful member of Parliament in the world. What did

not Mr. Griffenbottom owe to the borough of Percycross? Did he not owe all his position in the world, all his friends, the fact that he was to be seen on the staircases of Cabinet Ministers, and that he was called "honourable friend" by the sons of dukes,—did he not owe it all to the borough of Percycross? Mr. Trigger and other friends of his, felt secure in their conviction that they had made a man of Mr. Griffenbottom. Mr. Griffenbottom understood enough of all this to answer Mr. Trigger without inserting in his letter any of those anathemas which he uttered in the privacy of his own closet. He did, indeed, expostulate, saying, that he would of course suggest a colleague, if a colleague were required; but did not Mr. Trigger and his other friends in the dear old borough think that just at the present moment a pacific line of action would be best for the interests of the dear old borough? Mr. Trigger answered him very quickly, and perhaps a little sharply. The Liberals had decided upon having two men in the field, and therefore a pacific line of action was no longer possible. Mr. Griffenbottom hurried over to the dear old borough, still hoping,—but could do nothing. The scent of the battle was in the air, and the foolish men of Percycross were keen for blood. Mr. Griffenbottom smiled and promised, and declared to himself that there was no peace for the politician on this side the grave. He made known his desires,—or the desire rather of the borough,—to a certain gentleman connected with a certain club in London, and the gentleman in question on the following day waited upon Sir Thomas. Sir Thomas had always been true "to the party,"—so the gentleman in question was good enough to say.

Everybody had regretted the loss of Sir Thomas from the House. The present opportunity of returning to it was almost unparalleled, seeing that thing was so nearly a certainty. Griffenbottom had always been at the top of the poll, and the large majority of the new voters were men in the employment of Conservative masters. The gentleman in question was very clear in his explanation that there was a complete understanding on this matter between the employers and employed at Percycross. It was the nature of the Percycross artizan to vote as his master voted. They made boots, mustard, and paper at Percycross. The men in the mustard and paper trade were quite safe; excellent men, who went in a line to the poll, and voted just as the master paper-makers and master mustard-makers desired. The gentleman from the club acknowledged that there was a difficulty about the boot-trade. All the world over, boots do affect radical sentiments. The master bootmakers,—there were four in the borough,—were decided; but the men could not be got at with any certainty.

"Why should you wish to get at them?" demanded Sir Thomas.

"No;—of course not; one doesn't wish to get at them," said the gentleman from the club,—"particularly as we are safe without them." Then he went into statistics, and succeeded in proving to Sir Thomas that there would be a hard fight. Sir Thomas, who was much pressed as to time, took a day to consider. "Did Mr. Griffenbottom intend to fight the battle with clean hands?" The gentleman from the club was eager in declaring that everything would be done in strict accordance with the law. He could give no

guarantee as to expenses, but presumed it would be about £300,—perhaps £400,—certainly under £500. The other party no doubt would bribe. They always did. And on their behalf,—on behalf of Westmacott and Co.,—there would be treating, and intimidation, and subornation, and fictitious voting, and every sin to which an election is subject. It always was so with the Liberals at Percycross. But Sir Thomas might be sure that on his side everything would be—"serene." Sir Thomas at last consented to go down to Percycross, and see one or two of his proposed supporters.

He did go down, and was considerably disgusted. Mr. Trigger took him in hand and introduced him to three or four gentlemen in the borough. Sir Thomas, in his first interview with Mr. Trigger, declared his predilection for purity. "Yes, yes; yes, yes; of course," said Mr. Trigger. Mr. Trigger, seeing that Sir Thomas had come among them as a stranger to whom had been offered the very great honour of standing for the borough of Percycross,—offered to him before he had subscribed a shilling to any of the various needs of the borough,—was not disposed to listen to dictation. But Sir Thomas insisted. "It's as well that we should understand each other at once," said Sir Thomas. "I should throw up the contest in the middle of it,—even if I were winning,—if I suspected that money was being spent improperly." How often has the same thing been said by a candidate, and what candidate ever has thrown up the sponge when he was winning? Mr. Trigger was at first disposed to tell Sir Thomas that he was interfering in things beyond his province. Had it not been that the day was late, and that the Liberals were supposed to be hard at

work,—that the candidate was wanted at once, Mr. Trigger would have shown his spirit. As it was he could only assent with a growl, and say that he had supposed all that was to be taken as a matter of course.

"But I desire to have it absolutely understood by all those who act with me in this matter," said Sir Thomas. "At any rate I will not be petitioned against."

"Petitions never come to much at Percycross," said Mr. Trigger. He certainly ought to have known, as he had had to do with a great many of them. Then they started to call upon two or three of the leading Conservative gentlemen. "If I were you, I wouldn't say anything about that, Sir Thomas."

"About what?"

"Well;—bribery and petitions, and the rest of it. Gentlemen when they're consulted don't like to be told of those sort of things. There has been a little of it, perhaps. Who can say?" Who, indeed, if not Mr. Trigger,—in regard to Percycross? "But it's better to let all that die out of itself. It never came to much in Percycross. I don't think there was ever more than ten shillings to be had for a vote. And I've known half-a-crown a piece buy fifty of 'em," he added emphatically. "It never was of much account, and it's best to say nothing about it."

"It's best perhaps to make one's intentions known," said Sir Thomas mildly. Mr. Trigger hummed and hawed, and shook his head, and put his hands into his trousers pockets;—and in his heart of hearts he despised Sir Thomas.

On that day Sir Thomas was taken to see four

gentlemen of note in Percycross,—a mustard-maker, a paper-maker, and two bootmakers. The mustard-maker was very cordial in offering his support. He would do anything for the cause. Trigger knew him. The men were all right at his mills. Then Sir Thomas said a word. He was a great foe to intimidation;—he wouldn't for worlds have the men coerced. The mustard-maker laughed cheerily. "We know what all that comes to at Percycross; don't we, Trigger? We shall all go straight from this place;—shan't we, Trigger? And he needn't ask any questions;—need he, Trigger?" "Lord 'a mercy, no," said Trigger, who was beginning to be disgusted. Then they went on to the paper-maker's.

The paper-maker was a very polite gentleman, who seemed to take great delight in shaking Sir Thomas by the hand, and who agreed with energy to every word Sir Thomas said. Trigger stood a little apart at the paper-maker's, as soon as the introduction had been performed,—perhaps disapproving in part of the paper-maker's principles. "Certainly not, Sir Thomas; not for the world, Sir Thomas. I'm clean against anything of that kind, Sir Thomas," said the paper-maker. Sir Thomas assured the paper-maker that he was glad to hear it;—and he was glad. As they went to the first bootmaker's, Mr. Trigger communicated to Sir Thomas a certain incident in the career of Mr. Spiveycomb, the paper-maker. "He's got a contract for paper from the *Walhamshire Herald*, Sir Thomas;—the largest circulation anywhere in these parts. Griffenbottom gets him that; and if ere a man of his didn't vote as he bade 'em, he wouldn't keep 'em, not a day. I don't know that we've a man in

Percycross so stanch as old Spiveycomb." This was Mr. Trigger's revenge.

The first bootmaker had very little to say for himself, and hardly gave Sir Thomas much opportunity of preaching his doctrine of purity. "I hope you'll do something for our trade, Sir Thomas," said the first bootmaker. Sir Thomas explained that he did not at present see his way to the doing of anything special for the bootmakers; and then took his leave. "He's all right," said Mr. Trigger. "He means it. He's all right. And he'll say a word to his men too, though I don't know that much 'll come of it. They're a rum lot. If they're put out here to-day, they can get in there to-morrow. They're a cankery independent sort of chaps, are bootmakers. Now we'll go and see old Pile. He'll have to second one of you,—will old Pile. He's a sort of father of the borough in the way of Conservatives. And look here, Sir Thomas;—let him talk. Don't you say much to him. It's no use in life talking to old Pile." Sir Thomas said nothing, but he determined that he would speak to old Pile just as freely as he had to Mr. Trigger himself.

"Eh;—ah;"—said old Pile; "you're Sir Thomas Underwood, are you? And you wants to go into Parliament?"

"If it please you and your townsmen to send me there."

"Yes;—that's just it. But if it don't please?"

"Why, then I'll go home again."

"Just so—but the people here ain't what they are at other places, Sir Thomas Underwood. I've seen many elections here, Sir Thomas."

"No doubt you have, Mr. Pile."

"Over a dozen;—haven't you, Mr. Pile?" said Trigger.

"And carried on a deal better than they have been since you meddled with them," said Mr. Pile, turning upon Trigger. "They used to do the thing here as it should be done, and nobody wasn't extortionate, nor yet cross-grained. They're changing a deal about these things, I'm told; but they're changing all for the worse. They're talking of purity,—purity,—purity; and what does it all amount to? Men is getting greedier every day."

"We mean to be pure at this election, Mr. Pile," said Sir Thomas. Mr. Pile looked him hard in the face. "At least I do, Mr. Pile. I can answer for myself." Mr. Pile turned away his face, and opened his mouth, and put his hand upon his stomach, and made a grimace, as though,—as though he were not quite as well as he might be. And such was the case with him. The idea of purity of election at Percycross did in truth make him feel very sick. It was an idea which he hated with his whole heart. There was to him something absolutely mean and ignoble in the idea of a man coming forward to represent a borough in Parliament without paying the regular fees. That somebody, somewhere, should make a noise about it,—somebody who was impalpable to him, in some place that was to him quite another world,—was intelligible. It might be all very well in Manchester and such-like disagreeable places. But that candidates should come down to Percycross and talk about purity there, was a thing abominable to him. He had nothing to get by bribery. To a certain extent he was willing to pay money in bribery himself. But that a

stranger should come to the borough and want the seat without paying for it was to him so distasteful that this assurance from the mouth of one of the candidates did make him very sick.

"I think you'd better go back to London, Sir Thomas," said Mr. Pile, as soon as he recovered himself sufficiently to express his opinion.

"You mean that my ideas as to standing won't suit the borough."

"No, they won't, Sir Thomas. I don't suppose anybody else will tell you so,—but I'll do it. Why should a poor man lose his day's wages for the sake of making you a Parliament man? What have you done for any of 'em?"

"Half an hour would take a working man to the poll and back," argued Sir Thomas.

"That's all you know about elections. That's not the way we manage matters here. There won't be any place of business agait that day." Then Mr. Trigger whispered a few words to Mr. Pile. Mr. Pile repeated the grimace which he had made before, and turned on his heel although he was in his own parlour, as though he were going to leave them. But he thought better of this, and turned again. "I always vote Blue myself," said Mr. Pile, "and I don't suppose I shall do otherwise this time. But I shan't take no trouble. There's a many things that I don't like, Sir Thomas. Good morning, Sir Thomas. It's all very well for Mr. Trigger. He knows where the butter lies for his bread."

"A very disagreeable old man," said Sir Thomas, when they had left the house, thinking that as Mr.

Trigger had been grossly insulted by the bootmaker he would probably coincide in this opinion.

But Mr. Trigger knew his townsman well, and was used to him. "He's better than some of 'em, Sir Thomas. He'll do as much as he says, and more. Now there was that chap Spicer at the mustard works. They say Westmacott people are after him, and if they can make it worth his while he'll go over. There's some talk about Apothecary's Hall;—I don't know what it is. But you couldn't buy old Pile if you were to give him the Queen and all the Royal family to make boots for."

This was to have been the last of Sir Thomas's preliminary visits among the leading Conservatives of the borough, but as they were going back to the "Percy Standard,"—for such was the name of the Blue inn in the borough,—Mr. Trigger saw a gentleman in black standing at an open hall door, and immediately proposed that they should just say a word or two to Mr. Pabsby. "Wesleyan minister," whispered the Percy-cross bear-leader into the ear of his bear;—"and has a deal to say to many of the men, and more to the women. Can't say what he'll do;—split his vote, probably." Then he introduced the two men, explaining the cause of Sir Thomas's presence in the borough. Mr. Pabsby was delighted to make the acquaintance of Sir Thomas, and asked the two gentlemen into the house. In truth he was delighted. The hours often ran heavily with him, and here there was something for him to do. "You'll give us a help, Mr. Pabsby?" said Mr. Trigger. Mr. Pabsby smiled and rubbed his hands, and paused and laid his head on one side.

"I hope he will," said Sir Thomas, "if he is of our way of thinking, otherwise I should be sorry to ask him." Still Mr. Pabsby said nothing; but he smiled very sweetly, and laid his head a little lower.

"He knows we're on the respectable side," said Mr. Trigger. "The Wesleyans now are most as one as the Church of England,—in the way of not being roughs and rowdies." Sir Thomas, who did not know Mr. Pabsby, was afraid that he would be offended at this; but he showed no sign of offence as he continued to rub his hands. Mr. Pabsby was meditating his speech.

"We're a little hurried, Mr. Pabsby," said Mr. Trigger; "perhaps you'll think of it."

But Mr. Pabsby was not going to let them escape in that way. It was not every day that he had a Sir Thomas, or a candidate for the borough, or even a Mr. Trigger, in that little parlour. The fact was that Mr. Trigger, who generally knew what he was about, had made a mistake. Sir Thomas, who was ready enough to depart, saw that an immediate escape was impossible. "Sir Thomas," began Mr. Pabsby, in a soft, greasy voice,—a voice made up of pretence, politeness, and saliva,—"if you will give me three minutes to express myself on this subject I shall be obliged to you."

"Certainly," said Sir Thomas, sitting bolt upright in his chair, and holding his hat as though he were determined to go directly the three minutes were over.

"A minister of the Gospel in this town is placed in a peculiar position, Sir Thomas," said Mr. Pabsby very slowly, "and of all the ministers of religion in

Percycross mine is the most peculiar. In this matter I would wish to be guided wholly by duty, and if I could see my way clearly I would at once declare it to you. But, Sir Thomas, I owe much to the convictions of my people."

"Which way do you mean to vote?" asked Mr. Trigger.

Mr. Pabsby did not even turn his face at this interruption. "A private man, Sir Thomas, may follow the dictates of—of—of his own heart, perhaps." Here he paused, expecting to be encouraged by some words. But Sir Thomas had acquired professionally a knowledge that to such a speaker as Mr. Pabsby any rejoinder or argument was like winding up a clock. It is better to allow such clocks to run down. "With me, I have to consider every possible point. What will my people wish? Some of them are eager in the cause of reform, Sir Thomas; and some others——"

"We shall lose the train," said Mr. Trigger, jumping up and putting on his hat.

"I'm afraid we shall," said Sir Thomas rising, but not putting on his.

"Half a minute," said Mr. Pabsby pleading, but not rising from his chair. "Perhaps you will do me the honour of calling on me when you are again here in Percycross. I shall have the greatest pleasure in discussing a few matters with you, Sir Thomas; and then, if I can give you my poor help, it will give me and Mrs. Pabsby the most sincere pleasure." Mrs. Pabsby had now entered the room, and was introduced; but Trigger would not sit down again, nor take off his hat. He boldly marshalled the way to the door, while Sir Thomas followed, subject as he came to the

eloquence of Mr. Pabsby. "If I can only see my way clearly, Sir Thomas," were the last words which Mr. Pabsby spoke.

"He'll give one to Griffenbottom, certainly," said Mr. Trigger. "Westmacott 'll probably have the other. I thought perhaps your title might have gone down with him, but it didn't seem to take."

All this was anything but promising, anything but comfortable; and yet before he went to bed that night Sir Thomas had undertaken to stand. In such circumstances it is very hard for a man to refuse. He feels that a certain amount of trouble has been taken on his behalf, that retreat will be cowardly, and that the journey for nothing will be personally disagreeable to his own feelings. And then, too, there was that renewed ambition in his breast,—an ambition which six months ago he would have declared to be at rest for ever,—but which prompted him now as strongly as ever to go forward and do something. It is so easy to go and see;—so hard to retreat when one has seen. He had not found Percycross to be especially congenial to him. He had felt himself to be out of his element there,—among people with whom he had no sympathies; and he felt also that he had been unfitted for this kind of thing by the life which he had led for the last few years. Still he undertook to stand.

"Who is coming forward on the other side?" he asked Mr. Trigger late at night, when this matter had been decided in regard to himself.

"Westmacott, of course," said Trigger, "and I'm told that the real Rads of the place have got hold of a fellow named Moggs."

"Moggs!" ejaculated Sir Thomas.

"Yes;—Moggs. The Young Men's Reform Association is bringing him forward. He's a Trades' Union man, and a Reform Leaguer, and all that kind of thing. I shouldn't be surprised if he got in. They say he's got money."

CHAPTER XXI.

The Liberals of Percycross.

Yes;—Ontario Moggs was appalled, delighted, exalted, and nearly frightened out of his wits by an invitation, conveyed to him by certain eager spirits of the town, to come down and stand on the real Radical interest for the borough of Percycross. The thing was not suggested to him till a day or two after Sir Thomas had been sounded, and he was then informed that not an hour was to be lost. The communication was made in the little back parlour of the Cheshire Cheese, and Moggs was expected to give an answer then and there. He stood with his hand on his brow for five minutes, and then asked that special question which should always come first on such occasions. Would it cost any money? Well;—yes. The eager spirits of Percycross thought that it would cost something. They were forced to admit that Percycross was not one of those well-arranged boroughs in which the expenses of an election are all defrayed by the public spirit of the citizens. It soon became clear that the deputation had waited upon Moggs, not only because Moggs was a good Radical, but because also Moggs was supposed to be a Radical with a command of money. Ontario frowned and expressed an opinion that all elections should be made absolutely free to the candidates.

"And everybody ought to go to 'eaven, Mr. Moggs," said the leading member of the deputation, "but everybody don't, 'cause things ain't as they ought to be." There was no answer to be made to this. Ontario could only strike his forehead and think. It was clear to him that he could not give an affirmative answer that night, and he therefore, with some difficulty, arranged an adjournment of the meeting till the following afternoon at 2 P.M. "We must go down by the 4.45 express to-morrow," said the leading member of the deputation, who even by that arrangement would subject himself to the loss of two days' wages,—for he was a foreman in the establishment of Mr. Spicer the mustard-maker,—and whose allowance for expenses would not admit of his sleeping away from home a second night. Ontario departed, promising to be ready with his answer by 2 P.M. on the following day.

How bright with jewels was the crown now held before his eyes, and yet how unapproachable, how far beyond his grasp! To be a member of Parliament, to speak in that august assembly instead of wasting his eloquence on the beery souls of those who frequented the Cheshire Cheese, to be somebody in the land at his early age,—something so infinitely superior to a maker of boots! A member of Parliament was by law an esquire, and therefore a gentleman. Ralph Newton was not a member of Parliament;—not half so great a fellow as a member of Parliament. Surely if he were to go to Polly Neefit as a member of Parliament Polly would reject him no longer! And to what might it not lead? He had visions before his eyes of very beautiful moments in his future life, in which, stand-

ing, as it were, on some well-chosen rostrum in that great House, he would make the burning thoughts of his mind, the soaring aspirations of his heart, audible to all the people. How had Cobden begun his career, —and Bright? Had it not been in this way? Why should not he be as great,—greater than either;—greater, because in these coming days a man of the people would be able to wield a power more extensive than the people had earned for themselves in former days? And then, as he walked alone through the streets, he took to making speeches,—some such speeches as he would make when he stood up in his place in the House of Commons as the member for Percycross. The honourable member for Percycross! There was something ravishing in the sound. Would not that sound be pleasant to the ears of Polly Neefit?

But then, was not the thing as distant as it was glorious? How could he be member for Percycross, seeing that in all matters he was subject to his father? His father hated the very name of the Cheshire Cheese, and was, in every turn and feeling of his life, diametrically opposed to his son's sentiments. He would, nevertheless, go to his father and demand assistance. If on such an occasion as this his father should give him a stone when he asked for bread, he and his father must be two! "If, when such a prospect as this is held out to his son, he cannot see it," said Ontario, "then he can see nothing!" But yet he was sure that his father wouldn't see it.

To his extreme astonishment Mr. Moggs senior did see it. It was some time before Mr. Moggs senior clearly understood the proposition which was made to him, but when he did he became alive to the honour,

—and perhaps profit,—of having a member of his firm in Parliament. Of politics in the abstract Mr. Moggs senior knew very little. Nor, indeed, did he care much. In matters referring to trade he was a Conservative, because he was a master. He liked to be able to manage his people, and to pay 5*s.* 3*d.* instead of 5*s.* 8*d.* for the making of a pair of boots. He hated the Cheshire Cheese because his son went there, and because his son entertained strange and injurious ideas which were propagated at that low place. But if the Cheshire Cheese would send his son to Parliament, Mr. Moggs did not know but what the Cheshire Cheese might be very well. At any rate, he undertook to pay the bills, if Ontario, his son, were brought forward as a candidate for the borough. He lost his head so completely in the glory of the thing, that it never occurred to him to ask what might be the probable amount of the expenditure. "There ain't no father in all London as 'd do more for his son than I would, if only I see'd there was something in it," said Moggs senior, with a tear in his eye. Moggs junior was profuse in gratitude, profuse in obedience, profuse in love. Oh, heavens, what a golden crown was there now within his grasp!

All this occurred between the father and son early in the morning at Shepherd's Bush, whither the son had gone out to the father after a night of feverish longing and ambition. They went into town together, on the top of the omnibus, and Ontario felt that he was being carried heavenwards. What a heaven had he before him, even in that fortnight's canvass which it would be his glory to undertake! What truths he would tell to the people, how he would lead them

with him by political revelations that should be almost divine, how he would extract from them bursts of rapturous applause! To explain to them that labour is the salt of the earth;—that would be his mission. And then, how sweet to teach them the value, the inestimable value, of the political privilege lately accorded to them,—or, as Ontario would put it, lately wrested on their behalf from the hands of an aristocracy which was more timid even than it was selfish;—how sweet to explain this, and then to instruct them, afterwards, that it was their duty now, having got this great boon for themselves, to see at once that it should be extended to those below them. "Let the first work of household suffrage be a demand for manhood suffrage." This had been enunciated by Ontario Moggs with great effect at the Cheshire Cheese;—and now, as the result of such enunciation, he was going down to Percycross to stand as a candidate for the borough! He was almost drunk with delight as he sat upon the knife-board of the Shepherd's Bush omnibus, thinking of it all.

He, too, went down to Percycross, making a preliminary journey,—as had done Sir Thomas Underwood,—timing his arrival there a day or two after the departure of the lawyer. Alas, he, also, met much to disappoint him even at that early period of the contest. The people whom he was taken to see were not millionaires and tradesmen in a large way of business, but leading young men of warm political temperaments. This man was president of a mechanics' institute, that secretary to an amalgamation of unions for general improvement, and a third chairman of the Young Men's Reform Association. They were delighted to see him, and were very civil; but he soon found

that they were much more anxious to teach him than they were to receive his political lessons. When he began, as unfortunately he did very early in his dealings with them, to open out his own views, he soon found that they had views also to open out. He was to represent them,—that is to say, become the mouthpiece of their ideas. He had been selected because he was supposed to have some command of money. Of course he would have to address the people in the Mechanics' Hall; but the chairman of the Young Men's Reform Association was very anxious to tell him what to say on that occasion. "I am accustomed to addressing people," said Ontario Moggs, with a considerable accession of dignity.

He had the satisfaction of addressing the people, and the people received him kindly. But he thought he observed that the applause was greater when the secretary of the Amalgamation-of-Improvement Unions spoke, and he was sure that the enthusiasm for the Young Men's chairman mounted much higher than had done any ardour on his own behalf. And he was astonished to find that these young men were just as fluent as himself. He did think, indeed, that they did not go quite so deep into the matter as he did, that they had not thought out great questions so thoroughly, but they had a way of saying things which,—which would have told even at the Cheshire Cheese. The result of all this was, that at the end of three days,—though he was, no doubt, candidate for the borough of Percycross, and in that capacity a great man in Percycross,—he did not seem to himself to be so great as he had been when he made the journey down from London. There was a certain feeling that he was a

cat's-paw, brought there for certain objects which were not his objects — because they wanted money, and some one who would be fool enough to fight a losing battle! He did not reap all that meed of personal admiration for his eloquence which he expected.

And, then, during these three days there arose another question, the discussion of which embarrassed him not a little. Mr. Westmacott was in the town, and there was a question whether he and Mr. Westmacott were to join forces. It was understood that Mr. Westmacott and Mr. Westmacott's leading friends objected to this; but the chairman of the young men, and the presidents and the secretaries on the Radical side put their heads together, and declared that if Mr. Westmacott were proud they would run their horse alone;—they would vote for Moggs, and for Moggs only. Or else,—as it was whispered, they would come to terms with Griffenbottom, and see that Sir Thomas was sent back to London. The chairman, and the presidents, and the secretaries were powerful enough to get the better of Mr. Westmacott, and large placards were printed setting forward the joint names of Westmacott and Moggs. The two Liberal candidates were to employ the same agent, and were to canvass together. This was all very well,—was the very thing which Moggs should have desired. But it was all arranged without any consultation with him, and he felt that the objection which had been raised was personal to himself. Worse than all, when he was brought face to face with Mr. Westmacott, he had not a word to say for himself! He tried it and failed. Mr. Westmacott had been a member of Parliament, and was a gentleman. Ontario, for aught he himself knew, might

have called upon Mr. Westmacott for the amount of Mr. Westmacott's little bill. He caught himself calling Mr. Westmacott "sir," and almost wished that he could bite out his own tongue. He felt that he was a nobody in the interview, and that the chairman, the secretaries, and the presidents were regretting their bargain, and saying among themselves that they had done very badly in bringing down Ontario Moggs as a candidate for their borough. There were moments before he left Percycross in which he was almost tempted to resign.

But he left the town the accepted candidate of his special friends, and was assured, with many parting grasps of the hand on the platform, that he would certainly be brought in at the top of the pole. Another little incident should be mentioned. He had been asked by the electioneering agent for a small trifle of some hundred pounds towards the expenses, and this, by the generosity of his father, he had been able to give. "We shall get along now like a house on fire," said the agent, as he pocketed the cheque. Up to that moment there may have been doubts upon the agent's mind.

As he went back to London he acknowledged to himself that he had failed hitherto,—he had failed in making that impression at Percycross which would have been becoming to him as the future member of Parliament for the borough; but he gallantly resolved that he would do better in the future. He would speak in such a way that the men of Percycross should listen to him and admire. He would make occasion for himself. He thought that he could do better than Mr. Westmacott,—put more stuff in what he had got to

say. And, whatever might happen to him, he would hold up his head. Why should he not be as good a man as Westmacott? It was the man that was needed, —not the outside trappings. Then he asked himself a question whether, as trappings themselves were so trivial, a man was necessarily mean who dealt in trappings. He did not remember to have heard of a bootmaker in Parliament. But there should be a boot-maker in Parliament soon;—and thus he plucked up his courage.

On his journey down to Percycross he had thought that immediately on his return to London he would go across to Hendon, and take advantage of his standing as a candidate for the borough; but as he returned he resolved that he would wait till the election was over. He would go to Polly with all his honours on his head.

CHAPTER XXII.

Ralph Newton's Decision.

ONTARIO MOGGS was at Percycross when Ralph Newton was making his formal offer to Polly Neefit. Ralph when he had made his offer returned to London with mixed feelings. He had certainly been oppressed at times by the conviction that he must make the offer even though it went against the grain with him to do so;—and at these moments he had not failed to remind himself that he was about to make himself miserable for life because he had been weak enough to take pecuniary assistance in the hour of his temporary necessities from the hands of Polly's father. Now he had made his offer; it had not been accepted, and he

was still free. He could see his way out of that dilemma without dishonour. But then that dilemma became very much smaller to his sight when it was surmounted,—as is the nature with all dilemmas; and the other dilemma, which would have been remedied had Polly accepted him, again loomed very large. And as he looked back at the matrimonial dilemma which he had escaped, and at Polly standing before him, comely, healthy, and honest, such a pleasant armful, and so womanly withal,—so pleasant a girl if only she was not to be judged and sentenced by others beside himself,—he almost thought that that dilemma was one which he could have borne without complaint. But Polly's suggestion that they should allow a year to run round in order that they might learn to know each other was one which he could not entertain. He had but three days in which to give an answer to his uncle, and up to this time two alternatives had been open to him,—the sale of his reversion and independence, or Polly and the future lordship of Newton. He had thought that there was nothing but to choose. It had not occurred to him that Polly would raise any objection. He had felt neither fear nor hope in that direction. It followed as a consequence now that the lordship must go. He would not, however, make up his mind that it should go till the last moment.

On the following morning he was thinking that he might as well go to the shop in Conduit Street, feeling that he could encounter Neefit without any qualms of conscience, when Mr. Neefit came to him. This was certainly a better arrangement. It was easier to talk of his own affairs sitting at ease in his own arm-chair, than to carry on the discussion among the various

sporting garments which adorned Mr. Neefit's little back room, subject to interruption from customers, and possibly within the hearing of Mr. Waddle and Herr Bawwah. Neefit, seated at the end of the sofa in Ralph's comfortable room, looking out of his saucer eyes with all his energy, was in a certain degree degrading,—but was not quite so degrading as Neefit at his own barn-door in Conduit Street. "I was just coming to you," he said, as he made the breeches-maker welcome.

"Well;—yes; but I thought I'd catch you here, Captain. Them men of mine has such long ears! That German who lets on that he don't understand only just a word or two of English, hears everything through a twelve-inch brick wall. Polly told me as you'd been with her."

"I suppose so, Mr. Neefit."

"Oh, she ain't one as 'd keep anything from me. She's open and straightforward, anyways."

"So I found her."

"Now look here, Captain. I've just one word to say about her. Stick to her." Ralph was well aware that he must explain the exact circumstances in which he stood to the man who was to have been his father-in-law, but hardly knew how to begin his explanation. "She ain't nowise again you," continued Mr. Neefit. "She owned as much when I put her through her facings. I did put her through her facings pretty tightly. 'What is it that you want, Miss?' said I. 'D' you want to have a husband, or d' you want to be an old maid?' They don't like that word old maid;—not as used again themselves, don't any young woman."

"Polly will never be an old maid," said Ralph.

"She owned as she didn't want that. 'I suppose I'll have to take some of 'em, some day,' she said. Lord, how pretty she did look as she said it;—just laughing and crying, smiling and pouting all at once. She ain't a bad 'un to look at, Captain?"

"Indeed she is not."

"Nor yet to go. Do you stick to her. Them's my words. 'D' you want to have that ugly boot-maker?' said I. 'He ain't ugly,' said she. 'D' you want to have him, Miss?' said I. 'No, I don't,' said she. 'Well!' said I. 'But I do know him,' said Polly, 'and I don't know Mr. Newton no more than Adam!' Them were her very words, Captain. Do you stick to her, Captain. I'll tell you what. Let's all go down to Margate together for a week." That was Mr. Neefit's plan of action.

Then Ralph got up from his easy-chair and began his explanation. He couldn't very well go down to Margate, delightful as it would be to sit upon the sands with Polly. He was so situated that he must at once decide as to the sale of his property at Newton. Mr. Neefit put his hands in his pockets, and sat perfectly silent, listening to his young friend's explanation. If Polly would have accepted him at once, Ralph went on to explain, everything would have been straight; but, as she would not do so, he must take his uncle's offer. He had no other means of extricating himself from his embarrassments. "Why, Mr. Neefit, I could not look you in the face unless I were prepared to pay you your money," he said.

"Drat that," replied Neefit, and then again he listened.

Ralph went on. He could not go on long in his present condition. His bill for £500 to Mr. Horsball of the Moonbeam was coming round. He literally had not £20 in his possession to carry on the war. His uncle's offer would be withdrawn if it were not accepted the day after to-morrow. Nobody else would give half so much. The thing must be done, and then;—why, then he would have nothing to offer to Polly worthy of her acceptance. "Bother," said Mr. Neefit, who had not once taken his eyes off Ralph's face. Ralph said that that might be all very well, but such were the facts. "You ain't that soft that you're going to let 'em rob you of the estate?" said the breeches-maker in a tone of horror. Ralph raised his hands and his eyebrows together. Yes;—that was what he intended to do.

"There shan't be nothing of the kind," said the breeches-maker. "What! £7,000 a year, ain't it? All in land, ain't it? And it must be your own, let 'em do what they will; mustn't it?" He paused a moment, and Ralph nodded his head. "What you have to do is to get a wife,—and a son before any of 'em can say Jack Robinson. Lord bless you! Just spit at 'em if they talks of buying it. S'pose the old gent was to go off all along of apperplexy the next day, how'd you feel then? Like cutting your throat;—wouldn't you, Captain?"

"But my uncle's life is very good."

"He ain't got no receipt against kingdom come, I dare say." Ralph was surprised by his tradesman's eloquence and wit. "You have a chick of your own,

and then you'll know as it'll be yours some way or other. If I'd the chance I'd sooner beg, borrow, starve, or die, before I'd sell it;—let alone working, Captain." There was satire too as well as eloquence in the breeches-maker. "No;—you must run your chance, somehow."

"I don't see my way," said Ralph.

"You have got something, Captain;—something of your own?"

"Well;—just enough to pay my debts, if all were sold, and buy myself a rope to hang myself."

"I'll pay your debts, Captain."

"I couldn't hear of it, Mr. Neefit."

"As for not hearing of it,—that's bother. You do hear of it now. And how much more do you want to keep you? You shall have what you want. You meant honest along of Polly yesterday, and you mean honest now." Ralph winced, but he did not deny what Neefit said, nor aught that was implied in the saying. "We'll bring you and Polly together, and I tell you she'll come round." Ralph shook his head. "Anyways you shall have the money; there now. We'll have a bit of a paper, and if this marriage don't come off there'll be the money to come back, and five per cent., when the old gent dies."

"But I might die first."

"We'll insure your life, Captain. Only we must be upon the square."

"Oh, yes," said Ralph.

"I'd rather a'most lose it all than think such a chance should be missed. £7,000 a year, and all in

land? When one knows how hard it is to get, to think of selling it!'"

Ralph made no positive promise, but when Mr. Neefit left him, there was,—so at least thought Mr. Neefit,—an implied understanding that "the Captain" would at once put an end to this transaction between him and his uncle. And yet Ralph didn't feel quite certain. The breeches-maker had been generous,—very generous, and very trusting; but he hated the man's generosity and confidence. The breeches-maker had got such a hold of him that he seemed to have lost all power of thinking and acting for himself. And then such a man as he was, with his staring round eyes, and heavy face, and dirty hands, and ugly bald head! There is a baldness that is handsome and noble, and a baldness that is peculiarly mean and despicable. Neefit's baldness was certainly of the latter order. Now Moggs senior, who was grey and not bald, was not bad looking,—at a little distance. His face when closely inspected was poor and greedy, but the general effect at a passing glance was not contemptible. Moggs might have been a banker, or an officer in the Commissariat, or a clerk in the Treasury. A son-in-law would have had hopes of Moggs. But nothing of the kind was possible with Neefit. One would be forced to explain that he was a respectable tradesman in Conduit Street in order that he might not be taken for a dealer in potatoes from Whitechapel. He was hopeless. And yet he had taken upon himself the absolute management of all Ralph Newton's affairs!

Ralph was very unhappy, and in his misery he went to Sir Thomas's chambers. This was about four

o'clock in the day, at which hour Sir Thomas was almost always in his rooms. But Stemm with much difficulty succeeded in making him believe that the lawyer was not at home. Stemm at this time was much disturbed by his master's terrible resolution to try the world again, to stand for a seat in Parliament, and to put himself once more in the way of work and possible promotion. Stemm had condemned the project,—but, nevertheless, took glory in it. What if his master should become,—should become anything great and magnificent. Stemm had often groaned in silence, —had groaned unconsciously, that his master should be nothing. He loved his master thoroughly,—loving no one else in the whole world,—and sympathised with him acutely. Still he had condemned the project. "There's so many of them, Sir Thomas, as is only wanting to put their fingers into somebody's eyes." "No doubt, Stemm, no doubt," said Sir Thomas; "and as well into mine as another's." "That's it, Sir Thomas." "But I'll just run down and see, Stemm." And so it had been settled. Stemm, who had always hated Ralph Newton, and who now regarded his master's time as more precious than ever, would hardly give any answer at all to Ralph's enquiries. His master might be at home at Fulham,—probably was. Where should a gentleman so likely be as at home,—that is, when he wasn't in chambers? "Anyways, he's not here," said Stemm, bobbing his head, and holding the door ready to close it. Ralph was convinced, then dined at his club, and afterwards went down to Fulham. He had heard nothing from Stemm, or elsewhere, of the intended candidature.

Sir Thomas was not at Fulham, nor did the girls know aught of his whereabouts. But the great story was soon told. Papa was going to stand for Percycross. "We are so glad," said Mary Bonner, bursting out into enthusiasm. "We walk about the garden making speeches to the electors all day. Oh dear, I do wish we could do something."

"Glad is no word," said Clarissa. "But if he loses it!"

"The very trying for it is good," said Patience. "It is just the proper thing for papa."

"I shall feel so proud when uncle is in Parliament again," said Mary Bonner. "A woman's pride is always vicarious;—but still it is pride."

Ralph also was surprised,—so much surprised that for a few minutes his own affairs were turned out of his head. He, too, had thought that Sir Thomas would never again do anything in the world,—unless that book should be written of which he had so often heard hints,—though never yet, with any accuracy, its name or subject. Sir Thomas, he was told, had been at Percycross, but was not supposed to be there now. "Of course he was in his chambers," said Clarissa. "Old Stemm does know how to tell lies so well!" It was, however, acknowledged that, having on his hands a piece of business so very weighty, Sir Thomas might be almost anywhere without any fault on his part. A gentleman in the throbs of an election for Parliament could not be expected to be at home. Even Patience did not feel called upon to regret his absence.

Before he went back to town Ralph found himself alone with Mary for a few minutes. "Mr. New-

ton," she said, "why don't you stand for Parliament?"

"I have not the means."

"You have great prospects. I should have thought you were just the man who ought to make it the work of your life to get into Parliament." Ralph began to ask himself what had been the work of his life. "They say that to be of real use a man ought to begin young."

"Nobody ought to go into the House without money," said Ralph.

"That means, I suppose, that men shouldn't go in who want their time to earn their bread. But you haven't that to do. If I were a man such as you are I would always try to be something. I am sure Parliament was meant for men having estates such as you will have."

"When I've got it, I'll think about Parliament, Miss Bonner."

"Perhaps it will be too late then. Don't you know that song of 'Excelsior,' Mr. Newton? You ought to learn to sing it."

Yes;—he was learning to sing it after a fine fashion;—borrowing his tradesman's money, and promising to marry his tradesman's daughter! He was half inclined to be angry with this interference from Mary Bonner;—and yet he liked her for it. Could it be that she herself felt an interest in what concerned him? "Ah me,"—he said to himself,—"how much better would it have been to have learned something, to have fitted myself for some high work; and to have been able to choose some such woman as this for my

wife!" And all that had been sacrificed to horses at the Moonbeam, and little dinners with Captain Fooks and Lieutenant Cox! Every now and again during his life Phœbus had touched his trembling ears, and had given him to know that to sport with the tangles of Naæra's hair was not satisfactory as the work of a man's life. But, alas, the god had intervened but to little purpose. The horses at the Moonbeam, which had been two, became four, and then six; and now he was pledged to marry Polly Neefit,—if only he could induce Polly Neefit to have him. It was too late in the day for him to think now of Parliament and Mary Bonner.

And then, before he left them, poor Clary whispered a word into his ear,—a cousinly, brotherly word, such as their circumstances authorised her to make. "Is it settled about the property, Ralph?" For she, too, had heard that this question of a sale was going forward.

"Not quite, Clary."

"You won't sell it; will you?"

"I don't think I shall."

"Oh, don't;—pray don't. Anything will be better than that. It is so good to wait." She was thinking only of Ralph, and of his interests, but she could not forget the lesson which she was daily teaching to herself.

"If I can help it, I shall not sell it."

"Papa will help you;—will he not? If I were you they should drag me in pieces before I would part with my birthright;—and such a birthright!" It had occurred to her once that Ralph might feel that, after

what had passed between them one night on the lawn, he was bound not to wait, that it was his duty so to settle his affairs that he might at once go to her father and say,—"Though I shall never be Mr. Newton of Newton, I have still such and such means of supporting your daughter." Ah! if he would only be open with her, and tell her everything, he would soon know how unnecessary it was to make a sacrifice for her. He pressed her hand as he left her, and said a word that was a word of comfort. "Clary, I cannot speak with certainty, but I do not think that it will be sold."

"I am so glad!" she said. "Oh, Ralph, never, never part with it." And then she blushed, as she thought of what she had said. Could it be that he would think that she was speaking for her own sake; —because she looked forward to reigning some day as mistress of Newton Priory? Ah, no, Ralph would never misinterpret her thoughts in a manner so unmanly as that!

The day came, and it was absolutely necessary that the answer should be given. Neefit came to prompt him again, and seemed to sit on the sofa with more feeling of being at home than he had displayed before. He brought his cheque-book with him, and laid it rather ostentatiously upon the table. He had good news, too, from Polly. "If Mr. Newton would come down to Margate, she would be ever so glad." That was the message as given by Mr. Neefit, but the reader will probably doubt that it came exactly in those words from Polly's lips. Ralph was angry, and shook his head in wrath. "Well, Captain, how's it to be?" asked Mr. Neefit.

"I shall let my uncle know that I intend to keep my property," said Ralph, with as much dignity as he knew how to assume.

The breeches-maker jumped up and crowed,—actually crowed, as might have crowed a cock. It was an art that he had learned in his youth. "That's my lad of wax," he said, slapping Ralph on the shoulder. "And now tell us how much it's to be," said he, opening the cheque-book. But Ralph declined to take money at the present moment, endeavouring to awe the breeches-maker back into sobriety by his manner. Neefit did put up his cheque-book, but was not awed back into perfect sobriety. "Come to me when you want it, and you shall have it, Captain. Don't let that chap as 'as the 'orses be any way disagreeable. You tell him he can have it all when he wants it. And he can;—be blowed if he can't. We'll see it through, Captain. And now, Captain, when'll you come out and see Polly?" Ralph would give no definite answer to this,—on account of business, but was induced at last to send his love to Miss Neefit. "That man will drive me into a lunatic asylum at last," he said to himself, as he threw himself into his arm-chair when Neefit had departed.

Nevertheless, he wrote his letter to his uncle's lawyer, Mr. Carey, as follows:—

"—— Club, 20th Sept., 186—.

"DEAR SIR,

"After mature consideration I have resolved upon declining the offer made to me by my uncle respecting the Newton property.

"Faithfully yours,

"RALPH NEWTON.

"Richard Carey, Esq."

It was very short, but it seemed to him to contain all that there was to be said. He might, indeed, have expressed regret that so much trouble had been occasioned;—but the trouble had been taken not for his sake, and he was not bound to denude himself of his property because his uncle had taken trouble.

When the letter was put into the Squire's hands in Mr. Carey's private room, the Squire was nearly mad with rage. In spite of all that his son had told him, in disregard of all his own solicitor's cautions, in the teeth of his nephew Gregory's certainty, he had felt sure that the thing would be done. The young man was penniless, and must sell; and he could sell nowhere else with circumstances so favourable. And now the young man wrote a letter as though he were declining to deal about a horse! "It's some sham, some falsehood," said the Squire. "Some low attorney is putting him up to thinking that he can get more out of me."

"It's possible," said Mr. Carey; "but there's nothing more to be done." The Squire when last in London had asserted most positively that he would not increase his bid.

"But he's penniless," said the Squire.

"There are those about him that will put him in the way of raising money," said the lawyer.

"And so the property will go to the hammer,—and I can do nothing to help it!" Mr. Carey did not tell his client that a gentleman had no right to complain because he could not deal with effects which were not his own; but that was the line which his thoughts took. The Squire walked about the room, lashing himself in his rage. He could not bear to be

beaten. "How much more would do it?" he said at last. It would be terribly bitter to him to be made to give way, to be driven to increase the price; but even that would be less bitter than failure.

"I should say nothing,—just at present, if I were you," said Mr. Carey. The Squire still walked about the room. "If he raises money on the estate we shall hear of it. And so much of his rights as pass from him we can purchase. It will be more prudent for us to wait."

"Would another £5,000 do it at once?" said the Squire.

"At any rate I would not offer it," said Mr. Carey.

"Ah;—you don't understand. You don't feel what it is that I want. What would you say if a man told you to wait while your hand was in the fire?"

"But you are in possession, Mr. Newton."

"No;—I'm not. I'm not in possession. I'm only a lodger in the place. I can do nothing. I cannot even build a farm-house for a tenant."

"Surely you can, Mr. Gregory."

"What;—for him! You think that would be one of the delights of possession? Put my money into the ground like seed, in order that the fruit may be gathered by him! I'm not good enough Christian, Mr. Carey, to take much delight in that. I'll tell you what it is, Mr. Carey. The place is a hell upon earth to me, till I can call it my own." At last he left his lawyer, and went back to Newton Priory, having given instructions that the transaction should be re-opened between the two lawyers, and that additional

money, to the extent of £5,000, should by degrees be offered.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"I'll be a Hypocrite if you choose."

THERE could hardly be a more unhappy man than was the Squire on his journey home. He had buoyed himself up with hope till he had felt certain that he would return to Newton Priory its real and permanent owner, no longer a lodger in the place, as he had called himself to the lawyer, but able to look upon every tree as his own, with power to cut down every oak upon the property; though, as he knew very well, he would rather spill blood from his veins than cut down one of them. But in that case he would preserve the oaks,—preserve them by his own decision,—because they were his own, and because he could give them to his own son. His son should cut them down if he pleased. And then the power of putting up would be quite as sweet to him as the power of pulling down. What pleasure would he have in making every deficient house upon the estate efficient, when he knew that the stones as he laid them would not become the property of his enemy. He was a man who had never spent his full income. The property had been in his hands now for some fifteen years, and he had already amassed a considerable sum of money,—a sum which would have enabled him to buy out his nephew altogether, without selling an acre,—presuming the price already fixed to have been sufficient. He had determined to sell something, knowing that he could not do as he would do

with the remainder if his hands were empty. He had settled it all in his mind;—how Ralph, his Ralph, must marry, and have a separate income. There would be no doubt about his Ralph's marriage when once it should be known that his Ralph was the heir to Newton. The bar sinister would matter but little then;—would be clean forgotten. His mind had been full of all this as he had come up to London. It had all been settled. He had decided upon ignoring altogether those cautions which his son and nephew and lawyer had croaked into his ears. This legitimate heir was a ruined spendthrift, who had no alternative but to raise money, no ambition but to spend money, no pursuit but to waste money. His temperament was so sanguine that when he entered Mr. Carey's office he had hardly doubted. Now everything had been upset, and he was cast down from triumph into an abyss of despondency by two lines from this wretched, meaningless, poor-spirited spendthrift! "I believe he'd take a pleasure in seeing the property going to the dogs, merely to spite me," said the Squire to his son, as soon as he reached home,—having probably forgotten his former idea that his nephew was determined, with the pertinacity of a patient, far-sighted Jew money-lender, to wring from him the last possible shilling.

Ralph, who was not the heir, was of his nature so just, that he could not hear an accusation which he did not believe to be true, without protesting against it. The Squire had called the heir a spiritless spendthrift, and a malicious evil-doer, intent upon ruining the estate, and a grasping Jew, all in the same breath.

"I think you are hard upon him, sir," said the son to the father.

"Of course you think so. At any rate you'll say so," said the Squire. "One would suppose I was thinking only of myself to hear you talk."

"I know what you're thinking of," said Ralph slowly; "and I know how much I owe you."

"I sometimes think that you ought to curse me," said the Squire.

After this, at this moment, with such words ringing in his ears, Ralph found it to be impossible to expostulate with his father. He could only take his father's arm, and whisper a soft feminine word or two. He would be as happy as the day was long, if only he could see his father happy.

"I can never be happy till I have placed you where you would have been," said the Squire. "The gods are just, and our pleasant vices make instruments to scourge us." He did not quote the line to himself, but the purport of it hung heavy on him. And yet he thought it hard that because he had money in his pocket he could not altogether make himself free of the scourge.

On the following morning he was less vituperative and less unreasonable, but he was still intent upon the subject. After breakfast he got his son into his own room,—the room in which he did his magistrate's work, and added up his accounts, and kept his spuds and spurs,—and seriously discussed the whole matter. What would it be wise that they should do next? "You don't mean to tell me that you don't wish me to buy it?" said the Squire. No; Ralph would not say that. If it were in the market, to be bought, and if the money were forthcoming, of course such a purchase would be expedient. "The money is forth-

coming," said the Squire. "We can make it up one way or another. What matter if we did sell Brownriggs? What matter if we sold Brownriggs and Twining as well?" Ralph quite acceded to this. As far as buying and selling were concerned he would have acceded to anything that would have made his father happy. "I won't say a word against this fellow, since you are so fond of him," continued the Squire. Ralph, though his father paused, made no reply to the intended sarcasm. "But you must allow that he had a reason for writing such a letter as he did."

"Of course he had a reason," said Ralph.

"Well;—we'll say that he wants to keep it."

"That's not unnatural."

"Not at all. Everybody likes to keep what he's got, and to get as much as he can. That's nature. But a man can't eat his cake and have it. He has been slow to learn that, no doubt; but I suppose he has learned it. He wouldn't have gone to Sir Thomas Underwood, in the way he did, crying to be helped,—if he hadn't learned it. Remember, Ralph, I didn't go to him first;—he came to me. You always forget that. What was the meaning then of Sir Thomas writing to me in that pitiful way,—asking me to do something for him;—and he who had I don't know how much, something like £800 a year, I take it, the day he came of age?"

"Of course he has been imprudent."

"He cannot eat his cake and have it. He wants to eat it, and I want to have it. I am sure it may be managed. I suppose you mean to go up and see him."

"See Ralph?"

"Why not? You are not afraid of him." The son smiled, but made no answer. "You might find out from him what it is he really wants;—what he will really do. Those attorneys don't understand. Carey isn't a bad fellow, and as for honesty, I'd trust him with anything. I've known him and his father all my life, and in any ordinary piece of business there is no one whose opinion I would take so soon. But he talks of my waiting, telling me that the thing will come round after a few years,—as if what one wanted was merely an investment for one's money. It isn't that."

"No, sir;—it isn't that."

"Not that at all. It's the feeling of the thing. Your lawyer may be the best man in the world to lay out your money in a speculation, but he doesn't dare to buy contentment for you. He doesn't see it, and one hardly dares to try and make him see it. I'd give the half of it all to have the other half, but I cannot tell him that. I'd give one half so long as that fellow wasn't to be the owner of the other. We'll have no opposition Newton in the place."

The Squire's son was of course willing enough to go up to London. He would see the heir at any rate, and endeavour to learn what were the wishes of the heir.

"You may say what money you like," said the Squire. "I hardly care what I pay, so long as it is possible to pay it. Go up to £10,000 more, if that will do it."

"I don't think I can bargain," said the son.

"But he can," said the father. "At any rate you

can find out whether he will name a price. I'd go myself, but I know I should quarrel with him."

Ralph prepared himself for the journey, and, as a matter of course, took the parson into his confidence; not telling the parson anything of the absolute sum named, but explaining that it was his purpose to become acquainted with the heir, and if possible to learn his views.

"You'll find Ralph a very different fellow from what my uncle thinks him," said the parson. "I shall be much mistaken if he does not tell you quite openly what he intends. He is careless about money, but he never was greedy." And then they got to other matters. "You will of course see the girls at Fulham," said the parson.

"Yes;—I shall manage to get down there."

The story of Gregory's passion for Clarissa was well known to the other. Gregory, who would not for worlds have spoken of such a matter among his general acquaintance, who could not have brought himself to mention it in the presence of two hearers, had told it all to the one companion who was nearest and dearest to him—"I wish I were going with you," said the parson.

"Why not come with me, then?"

"And yet I don't wish it. If I were in London I doubt whether I would go there. There could be no use in it."

"It is one of those things," said Ralph, "in which a man should never despair as long as there is a possibility."

"Ah, yes; people say so. I don't believe in that kind of perseverance myself;—at any rate not with

her. She knows her own mind,—as well as I know mine. I think I promised her that I would trouble her no more."

"Promises like that are mere pie-crusts," said Ralph.

"Give her my love;—that's all. And don't do that unless you are alone with her. I shall live it down some day, no doubt, but to tell the truth I have made up my mind not to marry. I'm half inclined to think that a clergyman shouldn't marry. There are some things which our ancestors understood pretty well, although we think they were such fools. I should like to see the new cousin, certainly."

Ralph said nothing more about the new cousin; and was perhaps hardly aware how greatly the idea of again seeing the new cousin had enhanced the pleasure of his journey to London. About a week after this he started, having devoted nearly all the afternoon before he went to the packing of a large basket of ferns,—to each root or small bundle of which was appended a long name in Latin,—as an offering to Patience Underwood. And yet he did not care very much for Patience Underwood.

It was just the end of September,—the last day of September, when he reached London. Ralph the heir was out of town, and the servant at his lodging professed she did not know where he was. She thought it probable that he was "at Mr. 'Orsball's,—Mr. 'Orsball of the Moonbeam, Barnfield,—a looking after his 'orses." She suggested this, not from any knowledge in her possession, but because Ralph was always believed to go to the Moonbeam when he left town. He would, however, be back next week. His namesake,

therefore, did not consider that it would be expedient for him to follow the heir down to the Moonbeam.

But the Underwood girls would certainly be at Fulham, and he started at once with his ferns for Popham Villa. He found them at home, and, singular to say, he found Sir Thomas there also. On the very next morning Sir Thomas was to start for Percycross, to commence the actual work of his canvass. The canvass was to occupy a fortnight, and on Monday the sixteenth the candidates were to be nominated. Tuesday the seventeenth was the day of the election. The whole household was so full of the subject that at first there was hardly room for the ferns. "Oh, Mr. Newton, we are so much obliged to you. Papa is going to stand for Percycross." That, or nearly that, was the form in which the ferns were received. Newton was quite contented. An excuse for entering the house was what he had wanted, and his excuse was deemed ample. Sir Thomas, who was disposed to be very civil to the stranger, had not much to say about his own prospects. To a certain degree he was ashamed of Percycross, and had said very little about it even to Stemm since his personal acquaintance had been made with Messrs. Spiveycomb, Pile, and Pabsby. But the girls were not ashamed of Percycross. To them as yet Percycross was the noblest of all British boroughs. Had not the Conservatives of Percycross chosen their father to be their representative out of all British subjects? Sir Thomas had tried, but had tried quite in vain, to make them understand the real fashion of the selection. If Percycross would only send him to Parliament, Percycross should be divine. "What d'ye think?" said Clary; "there's a man of the name of——. I

wish you'd guess the name of this man who is going to stand against papa, Mr. Newton."

"The name won't make much difference," said Sir Thomas.

"Ontario Moggs!" said Clary. "Do you think it possible, Mr. Newton, that Percycross,—the town where one of the Percys set up a cross in the time of the Crusaders,—didn't he, papa?——"

"I shall not consider myself bound to learn all that unless they elect me," said Sir Thomas; "but I don't think there were Percys in the days of the Crusaders."

"At any rate, the proper name is Percy St. Cross," said Clary. "Could such a borough choose Ontario Moggs to be one of its members, Mr. Newton?"

"I do like the name," said Mary Bonner.

"Perhaps papa and Ontario Moggs may be the two members," said Clary, laughing. "If so, you must bring him down here, papa. Only he's a shoemaker."

"That makes no difference in these days," said Sir Thomas.

The ferns were at last unpacked, and the three girls were profuse in their thanks. Who does not know how large a space a basket of ferns will cover when it is unpacked, and how large the treasure looms. They'll cover the rocks on the other side," said Mary. It seemed to Newton that Mary Bonner was more at home than she had been when he had seen her before, spoke more freely of what concerned the house, and was beginning to become one of the family. But still she was, as it were, overshadowed by Clarissa. In appearance, indeed, she was the queen among the three, but in active social life she did not compete with Clary. Patience stood as a statue on a pedestal, by no means

unobserved and ignored; beautiful in form, but colourless. Newton, as he looked at the three, wondered that a man so quiet and gentle as the young parson should have chosen such a love as Clary Underwood. He remained half the day at the villa, dining there at the invitation of Sir Thomas. "My last dinner," said Sir Thomas, "unless I am lucky enough to be rejected. Men when they are canvassing never dine;—and not often after they're elected."

The guest had not much opportunity of ingratiating himself specially with the beauty; but the beauty did so far ingratiate herself with him—unconsciously on her part,—that he half resolved that should his father be successful in his present enterprise, he would ask Mary Bonner to be the Queen of Newton Priory. His father had often urged him to marry,—never suggesting that any other quality beyond good looks would be required in his son's wife. He had never spoken of money, or birth, or name. "I have an idea," he had said, laughing, "that you'll marry a fright some day. I own I should like to have a pretty woman about the house. One doesn't expect much from a woman, but she is bound to be pretty." This woman was at any rate pretty. Pretty, indeed! Was it possible that any woman should be framed more lovely than this one? But he must bide his time. He would not ask any girl to marry him till he should know what position he could ask her to fill. But though he spoke little to Mary, he treated her as men do treat women whom they desire to be allowed to love. There was a tone in his voice, a worship in his eye, and a flush upon his face, and a hesitation in his manner, which told the story, at any rate to one of the party there.

"He didn't come to bring you the ferns," said Clarissa to Patience.

"He brought them for all of us," said Patience.

"Young men don't go about with ferns for the sake of the ferns," said Clary. "They were merely an excuse to come and see Mary."

"Why shouldn't he come and see Mary?"

"He has my leave, Patty. I think it would be excellent. Isn't it odd that there should be two Ralph Newtons. One would be Mrs. Newton and the other Mrs. Ralph."

"Clarissa, Clarissa!" said Patience, almost in a tone of agony,

"I'll be a hypocrite if you choose, Patty," said Clarissa, "or I'll be true. But you can't have me both at once." Patience said nothing further then. The lesson of self-restraint which she desired to teach was very hard of teaching.

There was just a word spoken between Sir Thomas and Newton about the property. "I intend to see Ralph Newton, if I can find him," said Ralph who was not the heir.

"I don't think he is far from town," said Sir Thomas.

"My father thinks that we might come to an understanding."

"Perhaps so," said Sir Thomas.

"I have no strong anxiety on the subject myself," said Newton; "but my father thinks that if he does wish to sell his reversion——"

"He doesn't wish it. How can a man wish it?"

"Under the circumstances it may be desirable."

"You had better see him, and I think he will tell

you," said Sir Thomas. "You must understand that a man thinks much of such a position. Pray come to us again. We shall always be glad to see you when you are in town."

CHAPTER XXIV.

"I find I must."

RALPH the heir had, after all, gone to Margate. Mr. Neefit had got such a hold upon him that he had no help for it. He found himself forced to go to Margate. When he was asked the second and third time, with all the energy of Mr. Neefit's eloquence, he was unable to resist. What reason could he give that he should not go to Margate, seeing that it was a thing quite understood that he was to endeavour to persuade Polly to be his wife. Neefit came to him two mornings running, catching him each morning just as he was smoking his cigar after breakfast, and was very eloquent. He already owed Mr. Neefit over five hundred pounds, and the debt on the first of these mornings was made up to one thousand pounds, a receipt being given for the shop debt on one side, and a bond for the whole money, with 5 per cent. interest, being taken in return for it. "You'd better pay off what little things you owes, Captain," said the generous breeches-maker, "and then, when the time comes, we'll settle with the gent about the 'orses." Neefit played his game very well. He said not a word about selling the horses, or as to any restriction on his young "Captain's" amusements. If you pull at your fish too hard you only break your line. Neefit had a very fine fish on his hook, and he meant to land it.

Not a word was said about Margate on that occasion, till the little pecuniary transaction was completed. Then the Captain was informed that the Neefit family would certainly spend the next week at that marine Paradise, and that Polly expected "the Captain's" company. "Them's the places," said Neefit, "where a girl grows soft as butter." This he said when the door-handle was in his hand, so that "the Captain" had no chance of answering him. Then he came again the next morning, and returned to the subject as though "the Captain" had already consented. There was a near approach to anger on one side and determined opposition on the other during this interview, but it ended in acquiescence on the Captain's side. Then Mr. Neefit was once more as gracious as possible. The graciousness of such men in acknowledging their own inferiority is sometimes wonderful. "You needn't be seen about with me, you know," said Mr. Neefit. This was said after Ralph had positively declared that he would not go actually with the Neefits and occupy the same apartments. "It would be altogether wrong,—for Polly's sake," said Ralph, looking very wise and very moral. To this view Neefit assented, not being quite sure how far "the Captain" might be correct in his ideas of morality.

"They've been and fixed young Newton for Polly," said Mr. Waddle that morning, to his friend Herr Bawwah, when he was told to mark off Ralph's account in the books as settled. "Dashed if they 'aven't," the German grunted. "Old Neverfit's a-playing at 'igh game, ain't he?" Such was the most undeserved nickname by which this excellent tradesman was known in his own establishment. "I don't

see nodin about 'igh," said the German. "He ain't got no money. I call it low." Waddle endeavoured to explain the circumstances, but failed. "De peoples should be de peoples, and de nobles should be de nobles," said Herr Bawwah;—a doctrine which was again unintelligible to Mr. Waddle.

Ralph having overcome an intense desire to throw over his engagement, to sell his horses, and to start for Jerusalem, did go down to Margate. He put himself up at an hotel there, ate his dinner, lighted a cigar, and went down upon the sands. It was growing dusk, and he thought that he should be alone,—or, at least, uninterrupted in a crowd. The crowd was there, and nobody in the place would know him,—except the Neefits. He had not been on the sands two minutes before he encountered Mr. Neefit and his daughter. The breeches-maker talked loud, and was extremely happy. Polly smiled, and was very pretty. In two minutes Neefit saw, or pretended to see, a friend, and Ralph was left with his lady-love. There never was so good-natured a father! "You'll bring her home to tea, Captain," said the father, as he walked off.

On that occasion Ralph abstained from all direct love-making, and Polly, when she found that it was to be so, made herself very pleasant. "The idea of your being at Margate, Mr. Newton," said Polly.

"Why not I, as well as another?"

"Oh, I don't know. Brighton, or some of those French places, or anywhere all about the world, would be more likely for you, I should think."

"Margate seems to be very jolly."

"Oh, I like it. But then we are not swells, you know. Have you heard the news? Ontario Moggs

is going to stand to be 'member of Parliament' for Percycross."

"My rival!" That was the only word he uttered approaching to the subject of love.

"I don't know anything about that, Mr. Newton. But it's true."

"Why, Sir Thomas Underwood is going to stand."

"I don't know anything about anybody else, but Ontario Moggs is going to stand. I do so hope he'll get in. They say he speaks quite beautiful. Did you ever hear him?"

"I never heard him."

"Ah, you may laugh. But a bootmaker can make a speech sometimes as well as,—as well as a peer of Parliament. Father says that old Mr. Moggs has given him ever so much money to do it. When a man is in Parliament, Mr. Newton, doesn't that make him a gentleman?"

"No."

"What then?"

"Nothing on earth can make a man a gentleman. You don't understand Latin, Polly?"

"No. I hope that isn't necessary for a young woman."

"By no means. But a poet is born, and can't be made."

"I'm not talking of poets. Ontario Moggs is a poet. But I know what you mean. There's something better even than to be a gentleman."

"One may be an angel,—as you are, Polly."

"Oh,—me;—I'm not thinking of myself. I'm thinking of Ontario Moggs,—going into Parliament. But then he is so clever!"

Ralph was not minded to be cut out by Moggs, junior, after coming all the way to Margate after his lady-love. The thing was to be done, and he would do it. But not to-night. Then he took Polly home, and ate prawns with Mr. and Mrs. Neefit. On the next day they all went out together in a boat.

The week was nearly over, and Ralph had renewed his suit more than once, when the breeches-maker proceeded to "put him through his facings." "She's a-coming round, ain't she, Captain?" said Mr. Neefit. By this time Ralph hated the sight of Neefit so thoroughly, that he was hardly able to repress the feeling. Indeed, he did not repress it. Whether Neefit did not see it, or, seeing it, chose to ignore the matter, cannot be said. He was, at any rate, as courteous as ever. Mrs. Neefit, overcome partly by her husband's authority, and partly induced to believe that as Ontario Moggs was going into Parliament he was no longer to be regarded as a possible husband, had yielded, and was most polite to the lover. When he came in of an evening, she always gave him a double allowance of prawns, and hoped that the tea was to his liking. But she said very little more than this, standing somewhat in awe of him. Polly had been changeable, consenting to walk with him every day, but always staving the matter off when he asked her whether she thought that she yet knew him well enough to be his wife. "Oh, not half well enough," she would say. "And then, perhaps, you know, I'm not over fond of the half that I do know." And so it was up to the last evening, when the father put him through his facings. In respect of "the Captain's" behaviour to Polly, the father had no just ground of complaint, for Ralph had

done his best. Indeed, Ralph was fond enough of Polly. And it was hard for a man to be much with her without becoming fond of her. "She's a-coming round, ain't she, Captain?" said Mr. Neefit.

"I can't say that she is," said Ralph, turning upon his heel near the end of the pier.

"You don't stick to her fast enough, Captain."

This was not to be borne. "I'll tell you what it is, Mr. Neefit," said Ralph, "you'd better let me alone, or else I shall be off."

"You'd only have to come back, Captain, you know," said Neefit. "Not as I want to interfere. You're on the square, I see that. As long as you're on the square, there ain't nothing I won't do. I ain't a-blaming you,—only stick to her." "Damn it all," said Ralph, turning round again in the other direction. But there was Neefit still confronting him. "Only stick to her, Captain, and we'll pull through. I'll put her through her facings to-night. She's thinking of that orkard lout of a fellow just because he's standing to be a Parl'ament gent." This did not improve matters, and Ralph absolutely ran away,—ran away, and escaped to his hotel. He would try again in the morning, would still make her his wife if she would have him! And then swore a solemn oath that in such case he would never see his father-in-law again.

Polly was not at all averse to giving him opportunities. They were together on the sands on the next morning, and he then asked her very seriously whether she did not think that there had been enough of this, that they might make up their minds to love each other, and be married as it were out of hand. Her father and mother wished it, and what was there

against it? "You cannot doubt that I am in earnest now, Polly?" he said.

"I know you are in earnest well enough," she answered.

"And you do not doubt that I love you?"

"I doubt very much whether you love father," said Polly. She spoke this so sharp and quickly that he had no reply ready. "If you and I were to be married, where should we live? I should want to have father and mother with me. You'd mean that, I suppose?" The girl had read his thoughts, and he hadn't a word to say for himself. "The truth is, you despise father, Mr. Newton."

"No, indeed."

"Yes, you do. I can see it. And perhaps it's all right that you should. I'm not saying—Of course he's not like you and your people. How should he be? Only I'm thinking, like should marry like."

"Polly, you're fit for any position in which a man could place you."

"No, I'm not. I'm not fit for any place as father wouldn't be fit for too. I'd make a better hand at it than father, I dare say,—because I'm younger. But I won't go anywhere where folk is to be ashamed of father. I'd like to be a lady well enough;—but it'd go against the very grain of my heart if I had a house and he wasn't to be made welcome to the best of everything."

"Polly, you're an angel!"

"I'm a young woman who knows who's been good to me. He's to give me pretty nigh everything. You wouldn't be taking me if it wasn't for that. And then, after all, I'm to turn my back on him because

he ain't like your people. No; never; Mr. Newton! You're well enough, Mr. Newton; more than good enough for me, no doubt. But I won't do it. I'd cut my heart out if I was turning my back upon father." She had spoken out with a vengeance, and Ralph didn't know that there was any more to be said. He couldn't bring himself to assure her that Mr. Neefit would be a welcome guest in his house. At this moment the breeches-maker was so personally distasteful to him that he had not force enough in him to tell a lie upon the matter. They were now at the entrance of the pier, at which their ways would separate. "Good-bye, Mr. Newton," said she. "There had better be an end of it;—hadn't there?"

"Good-bye, Polly," he said, pressing her hand as he left her.

Polly walked up home with a quick step, with a tear in her eye, and with grave thoughts in her heart. It would have been very nice. She could have loved him, and she felt the attraction, and the softness, and the sweet-smelling delicateness of gentle associations. It would have been very nice. But she could not sever herself from her father. She could understand that he must be distasteful to such a man as Ralph Newton. She would not blame Ralph. But the fact that it was so, shut for her the door of that Elysium. She knew that she could not be happy were she to be taken to such a mode of life as would force her to accuse herself of ingratitude to her father. And so Ralph went back to town without again seeing the breeches-maker.

The first thing he found in his lodgings was a note from his namesake.

"DEAR SIR,—I am up in town, and am very anxious to see you in respect of the arrangements which have been proposed respecting the property. Will you fix a meeting as soon as you are back?

"Yours always,

"RALPH NEWTON.

"Charing Cross Hotel, 2nd Oct., 186—."

Of course he would see his namesake. Why not? And why not take his uncle's money, and pay off Neefit, and have done with it? Neefit must be paid off, let the money come from where it would. He called at the hotel, and not finding his cousin, left a note asking him to breakfast on the following morning; and then he spent the remainder of that day in renewed doubt. He was so sick of Neefit,—whose manner of eating shrimps had been a great offence added to other offences! And yet one of his great sorrows was that he should lose Polly. Polly in her way was perfect, and he felt almost sure, now, that Polly loved him. Girls had no right to cling to their fathers after marriage. There was Scripture warranty against it. And yet the manner in which she had spoken of her father had greatly added to his admiration.

The two Ralphs breakfasted together, not having met each other since they were children, and having even then scarcely known each other. Ralph the heir had been brought up a boy at the parsonage of Newton Peele, but the other Ralph had never been taken to Newton till after his grandfather's death. The late parson had died within twelve months of his father,—a wretched year, during which the Squire and the

parson had always squabbled,—and then Ralph who was the heir had been transferred to the guardianship of Sir Thomas Underwood. It was only during the holidays of that one year that the two Ralphs had been together. The "Dear Sir" will probably be understood by the discerning reader. The Squire's son had never allowed himself to call even Gregory his cousin. Ralph the heir in writing back had addressed him as "Dear Ralph." The Squire's son thought that that was very well, but chose that any such term of familiarity should come first from him who was in truth a Newton. He felt his condition, though he was accustomed to make so light of it to his father.

The two young men shook hands together cordially, and were soon at work upon their eggs and kidneys. They immediately began about Gregory and the parsonage and the church, and the big house. The heir to the property, though he had not been at Newton for fourteen years, remembered well its slopes, and lawns, and knolls, and little valleys. He asked after this tree and that, of this old man and that old woman, of the game, and the river fishery, and the fox coverts, and the otters of which three or four were reputed to be left when he was there. Otters it seems were gone, but the foxes were there in plenty. "My father would be half mad if they drew the place blank," said the Squire's son.

"Does my uncle hunt much?"

"Every Monday and Saturday, and very often on the Wednesday."

"And you?"

"I call myself a three-day man, but I often make

a fourth. Garth must be very far off if he don't see me. I don't do much with any other pack."

"Does my uncle ride?"

"Yes; he goes pretty well;—he says he don't. If he gets well away I think he rides as hard as ever he did. He don't like a stern chace."

"No more do I," said Ralph the heir. "But I'm often driven to make it. What can a fellow do? An old chap turns round and goes home, and doesn't feel ashamed of himself; but we can't do that. That's the time when one ruins his horses." Then he told all about the Moonbeam and the B & B, and his own stud. The morning was half gone, and not a word had been said about business.

The Squire's son felt that it was so, and rushed at the subject all in a hurry. "I told you what I have come up to town about."

"Oh, yes; I understand."

"I suppose I may speak plainly," said the Squire's son.

"Why not?" said Ralph the heir.

"Well; I don't know. Of course it's best. You wrote to Carey, you know."

"Yes; I wrote the very moment I had made up my mind."

"You had made up your mind, then?"

Ralph had certainly made up his mind when he wrote the letter of which they were speaking, but he was by no means sure but that his mind was not made up now in another direction. Since he had become so closely intimate with Mr. Neefit, and since Polly had so clearly explained to him her ideas as

to paternal duty, his mind had veered round many points.

"Yes," said he. "I had made up my mind."

"I don't suppose it can be of any use for you and me to be bargaining together," said the other Ralph.

"Not in the least."

"Of course it's a great thing to be heir to Newton. It's a nice property, and all that. Only my father thought——"

"He thought that I wanted money," said Ralph the heir.

"Just that."

"So I do. God knows I do. I would tell you everything. I would indeed. As to screwing a hard bargain, I'm the last man in London who would do it. I thought that your father might be willing to buy half the property."

"He won't do that. You see the great thing is the house and park. We should both want that;—shouldn't we? Of course it must be yours;—and I feel—I don't know how I feel in asking you whether you want to sell it."

"You needn't mind that, Ralph."

"If you don't think the sum the lawyers and those chaps fixed is enough,——"

Then Ralph the heir, interrupting him, rose from his chair and spoke out. "My uncle has never understood me, and never will. He thinks hardly of me, and if he chooses to do so, I can't help it. He hasn't seen me for fourteen years, and of course he is entitled to think what he pleases. If he would have seen me the thing might have been easier."

"Don't let us go back to that, Ralph," said the Squire's son.

"I don't want to go back to anything. When it comes to a fellow's parting with such prospects as mine, it does come very hard upon him. Of course it's my own fault. I might have got along well enough;—only I haven't. I am hard up for money, —very hard up. And yet, if you were in my place, you wouldn't like to part with it."

"Perhaps not," said the Squire's son, not knowing what to say.

"As to bargaining, and asking so much more, and all the rest of it, that's out of the question. Somebody fixed a price, and I suppose he knew what he was at."

"That was a minimum price."

"I understand. It was all fair, I don't doubt. It didn't seem a great deal; but your father might live for thirty years."

"I hope he will," said the Squire's son.

"As for standing off for more money, I never dreamed of such a thing. If your father thinks that, he has wronged me. But I believe he always does wrong me. And about the building, and the trees, and the leases, and the house, he might do just as he pleased for me, I have never said a word, and never shall. I must say I sometimes think he has been hard upon me. In fourteen years he has never asked me to set my foot upon the estate, that I might see the place which must one day be mine."

This was an accusation which the Squire's son found it very difficult to answer. It could not be answered without a reference to his own birth, and it was almost impossible that he should explain his

father's feelings on the subject. "If this were settled, we should be glad that you would come," he said.

"Yes," said Ralph the heir; "yes,—if I consented to give up everything that is mine by right. Do you think that a fellow can bring himself to abandon all that so easily? It's like tearing a fellow's heart out of him. If I'll do that, my uncle will let me come and see what it is that I have lost! That which would induce him to welcome me would make it impossible that I should go there. It may be that I shall sell it. I suppose I shall. But I will never look at it afterwards." As it came to this point, the tears were streaming down his cheeks, and the eyes of the other Ralph were not dry.

"I wish it could be made pleasant for us all," said the Squire's son. The wish was well enough, but the expression of it was hardly needed, because it must be so general.

"But all this is rot and nonsense," said Ralph the heir, brushing the tears away from his eyes, "and I am only making an ass of myself. Your father wants to know whether I will sell the reversion to Newton Priory. I will. I find I must. I don't know whether I wouldn't sooner cut my throat; but unless I cut my throat I must sell it. I had a means of escape, but that has gone by. When I wrote that letter there was a means of escape. Now there's none."

"Ralph," said the other.

"Well; speak on. I've about said all I've got to say. Only don't think I want to ballyrag about the money. That's right enough, no doubt. If there's more to come, the people that have to look to it will say so. I'm not going to be a Jew about it."

"Ralph; I wouldn't do anything in a hurry. I won't take your answer in a hurry like this."

"It's no good, my dear fellow, I must do it. I must have £5,000 at once."

"You can get that from an insurance office."

"And then I should have nothing to live on. I must do it. I have no way out of it,—except cutting my throat."

The Squire's son paused a moment, thinking. "I was told by my father," said he, "to offer you more money."

"If it's worth more the people will say so," said Ralph the heir, impetuously; "I do not want to sell it for more than it's worth. Ask them to settle it immediately. There are people I must pay money to at once."

And so the Squire's son had done the Squire's errand. When he reported his success to Mr. Carey, that gentleman asked him whether he had the heir's consent in writing. At this the successful buyer was almost disposed to be angry; but Mr. Carey softened him by an acknowledgment that he had done more than could have been expected. "I'll see his lawyer to-morrow," said Mr. Carey, "and then, unless he changes his mind again, we'll soon have it settled." After that the triumphant negotiator sent a telegram home to his father: "It is settled, and the purchase is made."

CHAPTER XXV.

"Mr. Griffenbottom."

On Monday, the 16th of October, Sir Thomas Underwood went down to Percycross, and the first information given him was that Mr. Westmacott and Ontario Moggs had arrived on the Saturday, and were already at work. Mr. Griffenbottom was expected early on the Tuesday. "They've stolen a march on us, then," said Sir Thomas to Mr. Trigger.

"Give 'em rope enough, and they'll hang themselves," replied the managing agent. "There was Moggs spouting to them on his own hook on Saturday night, and Westmacott's chaps are ready to eat him. And he wanted to be doing it yesterday, Sunday; only some of them got hold of him and wouldn't let him loose. Moggs is a great card for us, Sir Thomas. There's nothing like one of them spouting fellows to overset the coach."

"Mr. Westmacott is fond of that too," said Sir Thomas.

"He understands. He's used to it. He does it in the proper place. Westmacott wasn't a bad member for the place;—wasn't perhaps quite free enough with his money, but Westmacott was very decent. Sir Thomas could not help feeling that Trigger spoke of it as though he wished that the two old members might be returned. Ah, well! had it been possible, Mr. Trigger would have wished it. Mr. Trigger understood the borough, knew well the rocks before them, and would have wished it,—although he had been so imperative with Mr. Griffenbottom as to the

second Conservative candidate. And now Mr. Griffenbottom had sent them a man who would throw all the fat in the fire by talking of purity of election! "And Moggs has been making a fool of himself in another direction," said Trigger, thinking that no opportunity for giving a valuable hint should be lost. "He's been telling the working men already that they'll be scoundrels and knaves if they take so much as a glass of beer without paying for it."

"Scoundrel is a strong word," said Sir Thomas, "but I like him for that."

"Percycross won't like him. Men would rather have all that left to their own feelings. They who want beer or money certainly won't thank him; and they who don't want it don't like to be suspected."

"Everyone will take it as addressed to his neighbour and not to himself."

"We are very fond of our neighbours here, Sir Thomas, and that kind of thing won't go down." This was on the evening of the candidate's arrival, and the conversation was going on absolutely while Sir Thomas was eating his dinner. He had asked Mr. Trigger to join him, and Mr. Trigger had faintly alleged that he had dined at three; but he soon so far changed his mind as to be able to express an opinion that he could "pick a bit," and he did pick a bit. After which he drank the best part of a bottle of port,—having assured Sir Thomas that the port at the Percy Standard was a sort of wine that one didn't get every day. And as he drank his port, he continued to pour in lessons of wisdom. Sir Thomas employed his mind the while in wondering when Mr. Trigger would go away, and

forecasting whether Mr. Trigger would desire to drink port wine at the Percy Standard every evening during the process of canvassing. About nine o'clock the waiter announced that a few gentlemen below desired to see Sir Thomas. "Our friends," said Mr. Trigger. "Just put chairs, and bring a couple of bottles of port, John. I'm glad they're come, Sir Thomas, because it shows that they mean to take to you." Up they were shown, Messrs. Spiveycomb, Spicer, Pile, Roodylands, —the bootmaker who has not yet been named,— Pabsby, and seven or eight others. Sir Thomas shook hands with them all. He observed that Mr. Trigger was especially cordial in his treatment of Spicer, the mustard-maker,—as to whose defection he had been so fearful in consequence of certain power which Mr. Westmacott might have in the wholesale disposal of mustard. "I hope you find yourself better," said Mr. Pile, opening the conversation. Sir Thomas assured his new friend that he was pretty well. "'Cause you seemed raythe down on your luck when you was here before," said Mr. Pile.

"No need for that," said Spicer, the man of mustard. "Is there, Trigger?" Trigger sat a little apart, with one bottle of port wine at his elbow, and took no part in the conversation. He was aware that his opportunities were so great that the outside supporters ought to have their time. "Any objection to this, Sir Thomas?" he said, taking a cigar-case out of his pocket. Sir Thomas, who hated tobacco, of course gave permission. Trigger rang the bell, ordered cigars for the party, and then sat apart with his port wine. In ten minutes Sir Thomas hardly knew where he was, so dense was the cloud of smoke.

"Sir Thomas," began Mr. Pabsby,—"if I could only clearly see my way——"

"You'll see it clear enough before nomination-day," said Mr. Pile.

"Any ways, after election," said a Conservative grocer. Both these gentlemen belonged to the Established Church, and delighted in snubbing Mr. Pabsby. Indeed, Mr. Pabsby had no business at this meeting, and so he had been told very plainly by one or two as he had joined them in the street. He explained, however, that his friend Sir Thomas had come to him the very first person in Percycross, and he carried his point in joining the party. But he was a mild man, and when he was interrupted he merely bided another opportunity.

"I hope, Sir Thomas, your mind is made up to do something for our trade," said Mr. Roodylands.

"What's the matter with your trade?" said Spiveycomb, the papermaker.

"Well;—we ain't got no jobs in it;—that's the matter," said Mr. Pile.

"As for jobs, what's the odds?" said a big and burly loud-mouthed tanner. "All on us likes a good thing when it comes in our way. Stow that, and don't let's be told about jobs. Sir Thomas, here's your health, and I wish you at the top of the poll,—that is, next to Mr. Griffenbottom." Then they all drank to Sir Thomas's health, Mr. Pabsby filling himself a bumper for the occasion.

It was eleven before they went away, at which time Mr. Pabsby had three times got as far as a declaration of his wish to see things clearly. Further than this he could not get; but still he went away in per-

fect good-humour. He would have another opportunity, as he took occasion to whisper when he shook hands with the candidate. Trigger stayed even yet for half an hour. "Don't waste your time on that fellow, Pabsby," he said. "No, I won't," said Sir Thomas. "And be very civil to old Pile." "He doesn't seem disposed to return the compliment," said Sir Thomas. "But he doesn't want your interest in the borough," said Trigger, with the air of a man who had great truths to teach. "In electioneering, Sir Thomas, it's mostly the same as in other matters. Nothing's to be had for nothing. If you were a retail seller of boots from Manchester old Pile would be civil enough to you. You may snub Spicer as much as you please, because he'll expect to get something out of you." "He'll be very much deceived," said Sir Thomas. "I'm not so sure of that," said Trigger; —"Spicer knows what he's about pretty well." Then, at last, Mr. Trigger went, assuring Sir Thomas most enthusiastically that he would be with him before nine the next morning."

Many distressing thoughts took possession of Sir Thomas as he lay in bed. He had made up his mind that he would in no way break the law, and he didn't know whether he had not broken it already by giving these people tobacco and wine. And yet it would have been impossible for him to have refused Mr. Trigger permission to order the supply. Even for the sake of the seat,—even for the sake of his reputation, which was so much dearer to him than the seat,—he could not have bidden guests, who had come to him in his own room, to go elsewhere if they required wine. It was a thing not to be done, and yet, for aught he

knew, Mr. Trigger might continue to order food and wine, and beer and tobacco, to be supplied ad libitum, and whenever he chose. How was he to put an end to it, otherwise than by throwing up the game, and going back to London? That now would be gross ill-usage to the Conservatives of Percycross, who by such a step would be left in the lurch without a candidate. And then was it to be expected that he should live for a week with Mr. Trigger, with no other relief than that which would be afforded by Messrs. Pile, Spivey-comb, and Co. Everything about him was reeking of tobacco. And then, when he sat down to breakfast at nine o'clock there would be Mr. Trigger!

The next morning he was out of bed at seven, and ordered his breakfast at eight sharp. He would steal a march on Trigger. He went out into the sitting-room, and there was Trigger already seated in the arm-chair, studying the list of the voters of Percycross! Heavens, what a man! "I thought I'd look in early, and they told me you were coming out or I'd have just stepped into your room." Into his very bed-room! Sir Thomas shuddered as he heard the proposition. "We've a telegram from Griffenbottom," continued Trigger, "and he won't be here till noon. We can't begin till he comes."

"Ah;—then I can just write a few letters," said Sir Thomas.

"I wouldn't mind letters now if I was you. If you don't mind, we'll go and look up the parsons. There are four or five of 'em, and they like to be seen; —not in the way of canvassing. They're all right, of course. And there's two of 'em won't leave a stone unturned in the outside hamlets. But they like to be

seen, and their wives like it." Whereupon Mr. Trigger ordered breakfast,—and ate it. Sir Thomas reminded himself that a fortnight was after all but a short duration of time. He might live through a fortnight,—probably,—and then when Mr. Griffenbottom came it would be shared between two.

At noon he returned to the Percy Standard, very tired, there to await the coming of Mr. Griffenbottom. Mr. Griffenbottom didn't come till three, and then bustled up into the sitting-room, which Sir Thomas had thought was his own, as though all Percycross belonged to him. During the last three hours supporters had been in and out continually, and Mr. Pabsby had made an ineffectual attempt or two to catch Sir Thomas alone. Trigger had been going up and down between the Standard and the station. Various men, friends and supporters of Griffenbottom and Underwood, had been brought to him. Who were paid agents, who were wealthy townsmen, who were canvassers and messengers, he did not know. There were bottles on the side-board the whole time. Sir Thomas, in a speculative manner, endeavouring to realise to himself the individuality of this and that stranger, could only conceive that they who helped themselves were wealthy townsmen, and that they who waited till they were asked by others were paid canvassers and agents. But he knew nothing, and could only wish himself back in Southampton Buildings.

At last Mr. Griffenbottom, followed by a cloud of supporters, bustled into the room. Trigger at once introduced the two candidates. "Very glad to meet you," said Griffenbottom. "So we're going to fight this little battle together. I remember you in the

House, you know, and I dare say you remember me. I'm used to this kind of thing. I suppose you ain't. Well, Trigger, how are things looking? I suppose we'd better begin down Pump Lane. I know my way about the place, Honeywood, as well as if it was my bed-room. And so I ought, Trigger."

"I suppose you've seen the inside of pretty nearly every house in Percycross," said Trigger.

"There's some I don't want to see the inside of any more. I can tell you that. How are these new householders going to vote?"

"Betwixt and between, Mr. Griffenbottom."

"I never thought we should find much difference. It don't matter what rent a man pays, but what he does. I could tell you how nineteen out of twenty men here would vote, if you'd tell me what they did, and who they were. What's to be done about talking to 'em?"

"To-morrow night we're to be in the Town Hall, Mr. Griffenbottom, and Thursday, an open-air meeting, with a balcony in the market-place."

"All right. Come along. Are you good at spinning yarns to them, Honeywood?"

"I don't like it, if you mean that," said Sir Thomas.

"It's better than canvassing. By George, anything is better than that. Come along. We may get Pump Lane, and Petticoat Yard, and those back alleys done before dinner. You've got cards, of course, Trigger." And the old, accustomed electioneerer led the way out to his work.

Mr. Griffenbottom was a heavy hale man, over sixty, somewhat inclined to be corpulent, with a red

face, and a look of assured impudence about him which nothing could quell or diminish. The kind of life which he had led was one to which impudence was essentially necessary. He had done nothing for the world to justify him in assuming the airs of a great man,—but still he could assume them, and many believed in him. He could boast neither birth, nor talent, nor wit,—nor, indeed, wealth in the ordinary sense of the word. Though he had worked hard all his life at the business to which he belonged, he was a poorer man now than he had been thirty years ago. It had all gone in procuring him a seat in Parliament. And he had so much sense that he never complained. He had known what it was that he wanted, and what it was that he must pay for it. He had paid for it, and had got it, and was, in his fashion, contented. If he could only have continued to have it without paying for it again, how great would have been the blessing! But he was a man who knew that such blessings were not to be expected. After the first feeling of disgust was over on the receipt of Trigger's letter, he put his collar to the work again, and was prepared to draw his purse,—intending, of course, that the new candidate should bear as much as possible of this drain. He knew well that there was a prospect before him of abject misery;—for life without Parliament would be such to him. There would be no salt left for him in the earth if he was ousted. And yet no man could say why he should have cared to sit in Parliament. He rarely spoke, and when he did no one listened to him. He was anxious for no political measures. He was a favourite with no section of a party. He spent all his evenings at the House, but it can hardly be imagined that those even-

ings were pleasantly spent. But he rubbed his shoulders against the shoulders of great men, and occasionally stood upon their staircases. At any rate, such as was the life, it was his life; and he had no time left to choose another. He considered himself on this occasion pretty nearly sure to be elected. He knew the borough and was sure. But then there was that accursed system of petitioning, which according to his idea was un-English, ungentlemanlike, and unpatriotic —"A stand-up fight, and if you're licked—take it." That was his idea of what an election should be.

Sir Thomas, who only just remembered the appearance of the man in the House, at once took an extravagant dislike to him. It was abominable to him to be called Underwood by a man who did not know him. It was nauseous to him to be forced into close relations with a man who seemed to him to be rough and ill-mannered. And, judging from what he saw, he gave his colleague credit for no good qualities. Now Mr. Griffenbottom had good qualities. He was possessed of pluck. He was in the main good-natured. And though he could resent an offence with ferocity, he could forgive an offence with ease. "Hit him hard, and then have an end of it!" That was Mr. Griffenbottom's mode of dealing with the offenders and the offences with which he came in contact.

In every house they entered Griffenbottom was at home, and Sir Thomas was a stranger of whom the inmates had barely heard the name. Griffenbottom was very good at canvassing the poorer classes. He said not a word to them about politics, but asked them all whether they didn't dislike that fellow Gladstone, who was one thing one day and another

thing another day. "By G——, nobody knows what he is," swore Mr. Griffenbottom over and over again. The women mostly said that they didn't know, but they liked the blue. "Blues allays was gallanter nor the yellow," said one of them. They who expressed an opinion at all hoped that their husbands would vote for him, "as 'd do most for 'em." "The big loaf;—that's what we want," said one mother of many children, taking Sir Thomas by the hand. There were some who took advantage of the occasion to pour out their tales of daily griefs into the ears of their visitors. To these Griffenbottom was rather short and hard. "What we want, my dear, is your husband's vote and interest. We'll hear all the rest another time." Sir Thomas would have lingered and listened; but Griffenbottom knew that 1,400 voters had to be visited in ten days, and work as they would they could not see 140 a day. Trigger explained it all to Sir Thomas. "You can't work above seven hours, and you can't do twenty an hour. And much of the ground you must do twice over. If you stay to talk to them you might as well be in London. Mr. Griffenbottom understands it so well, you'd better keep your eye on him." There could be no object in the world on which Sir Thomas was less desirous of keeping his eye.

The men, who were much more difficult to find than the women, had generally less to say for themselves. Most of them understood at once what was wanted, and promised. For it must be understood that on this their first day the Conservative brigade was moving among its firm friends. In Petticoat Yard lived papermakers in the employment of Mr. Spiveycomb, and in Pump Lane the majority of the inhabit-

ants were employed by Mr. Spicer, of the mustard works. The manufactories of both these men were visited, and there the voters were booked much quicker than at the rate of twenty an hour. Here and there a man would hold some peculiar opinion of his own. The Permissive Bill was asked for by an energetic tee-totaller; and others, even in these Tory quarters, suggested the ballot. But they all,—or nearly all of them,—promised their votes. Now and again some sturdy fellow, seeming to be half ashamed of himself in opposing all those around him, would say shortly that he meant to vote for Moggs, and pass on. "You do,—do you?" Sir Thomas heard Mr. Spicer say to one such man. "Yes, I does," said the man. Sir Thomas heard no more, but he felt how perilous was the position on which a candidate stood under the present law.

As regarded Sir Thomas himself, he felt, as the evening was coming on, that he had hardly done his share of the work. Mr. Griffenbottom had canvassed, and he had walked behind. Every now and then he had attempted a little conversation, but in that he had been immediately pulled up by the conscientious and energetic Mr. Trigger. As for asking for votes, he hardly knew, when he had been carried back into the main street through a labyrinth of alleys at the back of Petticoat Yard, whether he had asked any man for his vote or not. With the booking of the votes he had, of course, nothing to do. There were three men with books;—and three other men to open the doors, show the way, and make suggestions on the expediency of going hither or thither. Sir Thomas would always have been last in the procession, had there not been

one silent, civil person, whose duty it seemed to be to bring up the rear. If ever Sir Thomas lingered behind to speak to a poor woman, there was this silent, civil person lingering too. The influence of the silent, civil person was so strong that Sir Thomas could not linger much.

As they came into the main street they encountered the opposition party, Mr. Westmacott, Ontario Moggs, and their supporters. "I'll introduce you," said Mr. Griffenbottom to his colleague. "Come along. It's the thing to do." Then they met in the middle of the way. Poor Ontario was hanging behind, but holding up his head gallantly, and endeavouring to look as though he were equal to the occasion. Griffenbottom and Westmacott shook hands cordially, and complained with mutual sighs that household suffrage had made the work a deal harder than ever. "And I'm only a week up from the gout," said Griffenbottom. Then Sir Thomas and Westmacott were introduced, and at last Ontario was brought forward. He bowed and attempted to make a little speech; but nobody in one army or in the other seemed to care much for poor Ontario. He knew that it was so, but that mattered little to him. If he were destined to represent Percycross in Parliament, it must be by the free votes and unbiassed political aspirations of the honest working men of the borough. So remembering, he stood aloof, stuck his hand into his breast, and held up his head something higher than before. Though the candidates had thus greeted each other at this chance meeting, the other parties in the contending armies had exhibited no courtesies.

The weariness of Sir Thomas when this first day's

canvass was over was so great that he was tempted to go to bed and ask for a bowl of gruel. Nothing kept him from doing so but amazement at the courage and endurance of Mr. Griffenbottom. "We could get at a few of those chaps who were at the works, if we went out at eight," said Griffenbottom. Trigger suggested that Mr. Griffenbottom would be very tired. Trigger himself was perhaps tired. "Oh, tired," said Griffenbottom; "a man has to be tired at this work." Sir Thomas perceived that Griffenbottom was at least ten years his senior, and that he was still almost lame from the gout. "You'll be ready, Underwood?" said Griffenbottom. Sir Thomas felt himself bound to undertake whatever might be thought necessary. "If we were at it day and night, it wouldn't be too much," said Griffenbottom, as he prepared to amuse himself with one of the poll-books till dinner should be on the table. "Didn't we see Jacob Pucky?" asked the energetic candidate, observing that the man's name wasn't marked. "To be sure we did. I was speaking to him myself. He was one of those who didn't know till the day came. We know what that means; eh, Honeywood?" Sir Thomas wasn't quite sure that he did know; but he presumed that it meant something dishonest. Again Mr. Trigger dined with them, and as soon as ever their dinner was swallowed they were out again at their work, Sir Thomas being dragged from door to door, while Griffenbottom asked for the votes.

And this was to last yet for ten days more!

CHAPTER XXVI.

Moggs, Purity, and the Rights of Labour.

MR. TRIGGER had hinted that Ontario Moggs would be a thorn in the flesh of Mr. Westmacott's supporters at Percycross, and he had been right. Ontario was timid, hesitating, and not unfrequently brow-beaten in the social part of his work at the election. Though he made great struggles, he could neither talk, nor walk, nor eat, nor sit, as though he were the equal of his colleague. But when they came to politics and political management, there was no holding him. He would make speeches when speeches were not held to be desirable by his committee, and he was loud upon topics as to which it was thought that no allusion whatever should have been made. To talk about the ballot had from the first been conceded to Moggs. Mr. Westmacott was, indeed, opposed to the ballot; but it had been a matter of course that the candidate of the people should support that measure. The ballot would have been a safety-valve. But Moggs was so cross-grained, ill-conditioned, and uncontrollable, that he would not let the ballot suffice him. The ballot was almost nothing to him. Strikes and bribery were his great subjects; the beauty of the one and the ugliness of the other. The right of the labourer to combine with his brother labourers to make his own terms for his labour, was the great lesson he taught. The suicidal iniquity of the labourer in selling that political power which he should use to protect his labour was the source of his burning indignation. That labour was the salt of the earth, he told the men of Percycross very often;—and

he told them as often that manliness and courage were necessary to make that salt productive. Gradually the men of Percycross,—some said that they were only the boys of Percycross,—clustered round him, and learned to like to listen to him. They came to understand something of the character of the man who was almost too shame-faced to speak to them while he was being dragged round to their homes on his canvass, but whom nothing could repress when he was on his legs with a crowd before him. It was in vain that the managing agent told him that he would not get a vote by his spouting and shouting. On such occasions he hardly answered a word to the managing agent. But the spouting and shouting went on just the same, and was certainly popular among the bootmakers and tanners. Mr. Westmacott was asked to interfere, and did do so once in some mild fashion; but Ontario replied that having been called to this sphere of action, he could only do his duty according to his own lights. The young men's presidents, and secretaries, and chairmen were for awhile somewhat frightened, having been assured by the managing men of the Liberal committee that the election would be lost by the furious insanity of their candidate. But they decided upon supporting Moggs, having found that they would be deposed from their seats if they discarded him. At last, when the futile efforts to control Moggs had been maintained with patience for something over a week, when it still wanted four or five days to the election, an actual split was made in the Liberal camp. Moggs was turned adrift by the Westmacottian faction. Bills were placarded about the town explaining the cruel necessity for such action, and describing Moggs as a revolu-

tionary firebrand. And now there were three parties in the town. Mr. Trigger rejoiced over this greatly with Mr. Griffenbottom. "If they haven't been and cut their throats now it is a wonder," he said over and over again. Even Sir Thomas caught something of the feeling of triumph, and began almost to hope that he might be successful. Nevertheless the number of men who could not quite make up their minds as to what duty required of them till the day of the election was considerable, and Mr. Pile triumphantly whispered into Mr. Trigger's ear his conviction that "after all, things weren't going to be changed at Percycross quite so easily as some people supposed."

When Moggs was utterly discarded by the respectable leaders of the Liberal party in the borough, —turned out of the Liberal inn at which were the head-quarters of the party, and refused the right of participating in the Liberal breakfasts and dinners which were there provided, Moggs felt himself to be a triumphant martyr. His portmanteau and hat-box were carried by an admiring throng down to the Cordwainers' Arms,—a house not, indeed, of the highest repute in the town,—and here a separate committee was formed. Mr. Westmacott did his best to avert the secession; but his supporters were inexorable. The Liberal tradesmen of Percycross would have nothing to do with a candidate who declared that inasmuch as a man's mind was more worthy than a man's money, labour was more worthy than capital, and that therefore the men should dominate and rule their masters. That was a doctrine necessarily abominable to every master tradesman. The men were to decide how many hours they would work, what recreation they

would have, in what fashion and at what rate they would be paid, and what proportion of profit should be allowed to the members, and masters, and creators of the firm! That was the doctrine that Moggs was preaching. The tradesmen of Percycross, whether Liberal or Conservative, did not understand much in the world of politics, but they did understand that such a doctrine as that, if carried out, would take them to a very Gehenna of revolutionary desolation. And so Moggs was banished from the Northern Star, the inn at which Mr. Westmacott was living, and was forced to set up his Radical staff at the Cordwainers' Arms.

In one respect he certainly gained much by this persecution. The record of his election doings would have been confined to the columns of the *Percycross Herald* had he carried on his candidature after the usual fashion; but, as it was now, his doings were blazoned in the London newspapers. The *Daily News* reported him, and gave him an article all to himself; and even the *Times* condescended to make an example of him, and to bring him up as evidence that revolutionary doctrines were distasteful to the electors of the country generally. The fame of Ontario Moggs certainly became more familiar to the ears of the world at large than it would have done had he continued to run in a pair with Mr. Westmacott. And that was everything to him. Polly Neefit must hear of him now that his name had become a household word in the London newspapers.

And in another respect he gained much. All personal canvassing was now at an end for him. There could be no use in his going about from house to

house asking for votes. Indeed, he had discovered that to do so was a thing iniquitous in itself, a demoralising practice tending to falsehood, intimidation, and corruption,—a thing to be denounced. And he denounced it. Let the men of Percycross hear him, question him in public, learn from his spoken words what were his political principles,—and then vote for him if they pleased. He would condescend to ask a vote as a favour from no man. It was for them rather to ask him to bestow upon them the gift of his time and such ability as he possessed. He took a very high tone indeed in his speeches, and was saved the labour of parading the streets. During these days he looked down from an immeasurable height on the truckling, mean, sordid doings of Griffenbottom, Honeywood, and Westmacott. A huge board had been hoisted up over the somewhat low frontage of the Cordwainers' Arms, and on this was painted in letters two feet high a legend which it delighted him to read: MOGGS, PURITY, AND THE RIGHTS OF LABOUR. Ah, if that could only be understood, there was enough in it to bring back an age of gold to suffering humanity! No other Reform would be needed. In that short legend everything necessary for man was contained.

Mr. Pile and Mr. Trigger stood together one evening looking at the legend from a distance. "Moggs and purity!" said Mr. Pile in that tone of disgust and with that peculiar action which had become common to him in speaking of this election.

"He hasn't a ghost of a chance," said Mr. Trigger, who was always looking straight at the main point;—"nor yet hasn't Westmacott."

"There's worse than Westmacott," said Mr. Pile.

"But what can we do?" said Trigger.

"Purity! Purity!" said the old man. "It makes me that sick that I wish there weren't such a thing as a member of Parliament. Purity and pickpockets is about the same. When I'm among 'em I buttons up my breeches pockets."

"But what can we do?" asked Mr. Trigger again, in a voice of woe. Mr. Trigger quite sympathised with his elder friend; but, being a younger man, he knew that these innovations must be endured.

Then Mr. Pile made a speech, of such length that he had never been known to make the like before;—so that Mr. Trigger felt that things had become very serious, and that, not impossibly, Mr. Pile might be so affected by this election as never again to hold up his head in Percycross. "Purity! Purity!" he repeated. "They're a going on that way, Trigger, that the country soon won't be fit for a man to live in. And what's the meaning of it all? It's just this,—that folks wants what they wants without paying for it. I hate Purity, I do. I hate the very smell of it. It stinks. When I see the chaps as come here and talk of Purity, I know they mean that nothing ain't to be as it used to be. Nobody is to trust no one. There ain't to be nothing warm, nor friendly, nor comfortable any more. This Sir Thomas you've brought down is just as bad as that shoemaking chap;—worse if anything. I know what's a going on inside him. I can see it. If a man takes a glass of wine out of his bottle he's a asking hisself if that ain't bribery and corruption! He's got a handle to his name, and money, I suppose, and comes down here without knowing a chick or a child. Why isn't a poor man, as can't hardly live, to have his three

half crowns or fifteen shillings, as things may go, for voting for a stranger such as him? I'll tell you what it is, Trigger, I've done with it. Things have come to that in the borough, that I'll meddle and make no more." Mr. Trigger, as he listened to this eloquence, could only sigh and shake his head. "I did think it would last my time," added Mr. Pile, almost weeping.

Moggs would steal out of the house in the early morning, look up at the big bright red letters, and rejoice in his very heart of hearts. He had not lived in vain, when his name had been joined, in the public view of men, with words so glorious. Purity and the Rights of Labour. "It contains just everything," said Moggs to himself as he sat down to his modest, lonely breakfast. After that, sitting with his hands clasped upon his brow, disdaining the use of pen and paper for such work, he composed his speech for the evening, —a speech framed with the purpose of proving to his hearers that Purity and the Rights of Labour combined would make them as angels upon the earth. As for himself, Moggs, he explained in his speech,—analysing the big board which adorned the house,—it mattered little whether they did or did not return him. But let them be always persistent in returning on every possible occasion Purity and the Rights of Labour, and then all other good things would follow to them. He enjoyed at any rate that supreme delight which a man feels when he thoroughly believes his own doctrine.

But the days were very long with him. When the evening came, when his friends were relieved from their toil, and could assemble here and there through the borough to hear him preach to them, he was happy

enough. He had certainly achieved so much that they preferred him now to their own presidents and chairmen. There was an enthusiasm for Moggs among the labouring men of Percycross, and he was always happy while he was addressing them. But the hours in the morning were long, and sometimes melancholy. Though all the town was busy with these electioneering doings, there was nothing for him to do. His rivals canvassed, consulted, roamed through the town,—as he could see, —filching votes from him. But he, too noble for such work as that, sat there alone in the little upstairs parlour of the Cordwainers' Arms, thinking of his speech for the evening,—thinking, too, of Polly Neefit. And then, of a sudden, it occurred to him that it would be good to write a letter to Polly from Percycross. Surely the fact that he was waging this grand battle would have some effect upon her heart. So he wrote the following letter, which reached Polly about a week after her return home from Margate.

"Cordwainers' Arms Inn, Percycross,
"14th October, 186—.

"My dear Polly,

"I hope you won't be angry with me for writing to you. I am here in the midst of the turmoil of a contested election, and I cannot refrain from writing to tell you about it. Out of a full heart they say the mouth speaks, and out of a very full heart I am speaking to you with my pen. The honourable prospect of having a seat in the British House of Parliament, which I regard as the highest dignity that a Briton can enjoy, is very much to me, and fills my mind, and my heart, and my soul; but it all is not so

much to me as your love, if only I could win that seat. If I could sit there, in your heart, and be chosen by you, not for a short seven years, but for life, I should be prouder and happier of that honour than of any other. It ought not, perhaps, to be so, but it is. I have to speak here to the people very often; but I never open my mouth without thinking that if I had you to hear me I could speak with more energy and spirit. If I could gain your love and the seat for this borough together, I should have done more then than emperor, or conqueror, or high-priest ever accomplished.

"I don't know whether you understand much about elections. When I first came here I was joined with a gentleman who was one of the old members;—but now I stand alone, because he does not comprehend or sympathise with the advanced doctrines which it is my mission to preach to the people. Purity and the Rights of Labour;—those are my watchwords. But there are many here who hate the very name of Purity, and who know nothing of the Rights of Labour. Labour, dear Polly, is the salt of the earth; and I hope that some day I may have the privilege of teaching you that it is so. For myself I do not see why ladies should not understand politics as well as men; and I think that they ought to vote. I hope you think that women ought to have the franchise.

"We are to be nominated on Monday, and the election will take place on Tuesday. I shall be nominated and seconded by two electors who are working men. I would sooner have their support than that of the greatest magnate in the land. But your support would be better for me than anything else in the

world. People here, as a rule, are very lukewarm about the ballot, and they seemed to know very little about strikes till I came among them. Without combination and mutual support the working people must be ground to powder. If I am sent to Parliament I shall feel it to be my duty to insist upon this doctrine in season and out of season,—whenever I can make my voice heard. But oh, Polly, if I could do it with you for my wife, my voice would be so much louder.

"Pray give my best respects to your father and mother. I am afraid I have not your father's good wishes, but perhaps if he saw me filling the honourable position of member of Parliament for Percycross he might relent. If you would condescend to write me one word in reply I should be prouder of that than of anything. I suppose I shall be here till Wednesday morning. If you would say but one kind word to me, I think that it would help me on the great day.

"I am, and ever shall be,

"Your most affectionate admirer,

"ONTARIO MOGGS."

Polly received this on the Monday, the day of the nomination, and though she did answer it at once, Ontario did not get her reply till the contest was over, and that great day had done its best and its worst for him. But Polly's letter shall be given here. To a well-bred young lady, living in good society, the mixture of politics and love which had filled Ontario's epistle might perhaps have been unacceptable. But Polly thought that the letter was a good letter; and was proud of being so noticed by a young man who was standing for Parliament. She sympathized with

his enthusiasm; and thought that she should like to be taught by him that Labour was the Salt of the Earth,—if only he were not so awkward and long, and if his hands were habitually a little cleaner. She could not, however, take upon herself to give him any hope in that direction, and therefore confined her answer to the Parliamentary prospects of the hour.

"DEAR MR. MOGGS,"—she wrote,—"I was very much pleased when I heard that you were going to stand for a member of Parliament, and I wish with all my heart that you may be successful. I shall think it a very great honour indeed to know a member of Parliament, as I have known you for nearly all my life. I am sure you will do a great deal of good, and prevent the people from being wicked. As for ladies voting, I don't think I should like that myself, though if I had twenty votes I would give them to you,—because I have known you so long.

"Father and mother send their respects, and hope you will be successful.

"Yours truly,

"MARYANNE NEEFIT.

"Alexandra Cottage, Monday."

When Moggs received this letter, he was, not unnaturally, in a state of great agitation in reference to the contest through which he had just passed; but still he thought very much of it, and put it in his breast, where it would lie near his heart. Ah, if only one word of warmth had been allowed to escape from the writer, how happy could he have been. "Yes," he said scornfully,—"because she has known me all her

life!" Nevertheless, the paper which her hand had pressed, and the letters which her fingers had formed, were placed close to his heart.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The Moonbeam.

RALPH the heir had given his answer, and the thing was settled. He had abandoned his property for ever, and was to be put into immediate possession of a large sum of money,—of a sum so large that it would seem at once to make him a rich man. He knew, however, that if he should spend this money he would be a pauper for life; and he knew also how great was his facility for spending. There might, however, be at least a thousand a year for him and for his heirs after him, and surely it ought to be easy for him to live upon a thousand a year.

As he thought of this he tried to make the best of it. He had at any rate rescued himself out of the hands of Neefit, who had become intolerable to him. As for Polly, she had refused him twice. Polly was a very sweet girl, but he could not make it matter of regret to himself that he should have lost Polly. Had Polly been all alone in the world she would have been well enough,—but Polly with papa and mamma Neefit must have been a mistake. It was well for him, at any rate, that he was out of that trouble. As regarded the Neefits, it would be simply necessary that he should pay the breeches-maker the money that he owed them, and go no more either to Conduit Street or to Hendon.

And then what else should he do,—or leave un-

done? In what other direction should he be active or inactive? He was well aware that hitherto he had utterly wasted his life. Born with glorious prospects, he had now so dissipated them that there was nothing left for him but a quiet and very unambitious mode of life. Of means he had sufficient, if only he could keep that sufficiency. But he knew himself,—he feared that he knew himself too well to trust himself to keep that which he had unless he altogether changed his manner of living. To be a hybrid at the Moonbeam for life,—half hero and half dupe, among grooms and stable-keepers, was not satisfactory to him. He could see and could appreciate better things, and could long for them; but he could not attain to anything better unless he were to alter altogether his mode of life. Would it not be well for him to get a wife? He was rid of Polly, who had been an incubus to him, and now he could choose for himself.

He wrote to his brother Gregory, telling his brother what he had done. The writing of letters was ever a trouble to him, and on this occasion he told his tidings in a line or two:—"Dear Greg., I have accepted my uncle's offer. It was better so. When I wrote to you before things were different. I need not tell you that my heart is sore for the old place. Had I stuck to it, however, I should have beggared you and disgraced myself. Yours affectionately, R. N." That was all. What more was to be said which, in the saying, could be serviceable to any one? The dear old place! He would never see it again. Nothing on earth should induce him to go there, now that it could under no circumstances be his own. It would still belong to a Newton, and he would try and take comfort in that.

He might at any rate have done worse with it. He might have squandered his interest among the Jews, and so have treated his inheritance that it must have been sold among strangers.

He was very low in spirits for two or three days, thinking of all this. He had been with his lawyer, and his lawyer had told him that it must yet be some weeks before the sale would be perfected.

"Now that it is done, the sooner the better," said Ralph. The lawyer told him that if he absolutely wanted ready money for his present needs he could have it; but that otherwise it would be better for him to wait patiently,—say for a month. He was not absolutely in want of money, having still funds which had been supplied to him by the breeches-maker. But he could not remain in town. Were he to remain in town, Neefit would be upon him; and, in truth, though he was quite clear in his conscience in regard to Polly, he did not wish to have to explain personally to Mr. Neefit that he had sold his interest in Newton Priory. The moment the money was in his hands he would pay Mr. Neefit; and then——; why then he thought that he would be entitled to have Mr. Neefit told that he was not at home should Mr. Neefit trouble him again.

He would marry and live somewhere very quietly; perhaps take a small farm and keep one hunter. His means would be sufficient for that, even with a wife and family. Yes;—that would be the kind of life most suited for him. He would make a great change. He would be simple in his habits, domestic, and extravagant in nothing. To hunt once a week from his own little country house would be delightful. Who

should be the mistress of that home? That of all questions was now the most important.

The reader may remember a certain trifling incident which took place some three or four months since on the lawn at Popham Villa. It was an incident which Clary Underwood had certainly never forgotten. It is hardly too much to say that she thought of it every hour. She thought of it as a great sin;—but as a sin which had been forgiven, and, though a grievous sin, as strong evidence of that which was not sinful, and which if true would be so full of joy. Clary had never forgotten this incident; —but Ralph had forgotten it nearly altogether. That he had accompanied the incident by any assurance of his love, by any mention of love intended to mean anything, he was altogether unaware. He would have been ready to swear that he had never so committed himself. Little tender passages of course there had been. Such are common,—so he thought,—when young ladies and young gentlemen know each other well and are fond of each other's company. But that he owed himself to Clarissa Underwood, and that he would sin grievously against her should he give himself to another, he had no idea. It merely occurred to him that there might be some slight preparatory embarrassment were he to offer his hand to Mary Bonner. Yet he thought that of all the girls in the world Mary Bonner was the one to whom he would best like to offer it. It might indeed be possible for him to marry some young woman with money; but in his present frame of mind he was opposed to any such effort. Hitherto things with him had been all worldly, empty, useless, and at the same time distaste-

ful. He was to have married Polly Neefit for her money, and he had been wretched ever since he had entertained the idea. Love and a cottage were, he knew, things incompatible; but the love and the cottage implied in those words were synonymous with absolute poverty. Love with thirty thousand pounds, even though it should have a cottage joined with it, need not be a poverty-stricken love. He was sick of the world,—of the world such as he had made it for himself, and he would see if he could not do something better. He would first get Mary Bonner, and then he would get the farm. He was so much delighted with the scheme which he thus made for himself, that he went to his club and dined there pleasantly, allowing himself a bottle of champagne as a sort of reward for having made up his mind to so much virtue. He met a friend or two, and spent a pleasant evening, and as he walked home to his lodgings in the evening was quite in love with his prospects. It was well for him to have rid himself of the burden of an inheritance which might perhaps not have been his for the next five-and-twenty years. As he undressed himself he considered whether it would be well for him at once to throw himself at Mary Bonner's feet. There were two reasons for not doing this quite immediately. He had been told by his lawyer that he ought to wait for some form of assent or agreement from the Squire before he took any important step as consequent upon the new arrangement in regard to the property, and then Sir Thomas was still among the electors at Percycross. He wished to do everything that was proper, and would wait for the return of Sir Thomas. But he must do something at

once. To remain in his lodgings and at his club was not in accord with that better path in life which he had chalked out for himself.

Of course he must go down to the Moonbeam. He had four horses there, and must sell at least three of them. One hunter he intended to allow himself. There were Brag, Banker, Buff, and Brewer; and he thought that he would keep Brag. Brag was only six years old, and might last him for the next seven years. In the meantime he could see a little cub-hunting, and live at the Moonbeam for a week at any rate as cheaply as he could in London. So he went down to the Moonbeam, and put himself under the charge of Mr. Horsball.

And here he found himself in luck. Lieutenant Cox was there, and with the lieutenant a certain Fred Pepper, who hunted habitually with the B and B. Lieutenant Cox had soon told his little tale. He had sold out, and had promised his family that he would go to Australia. But he intended to "take one more winter out of himself," as he phrased it. He had made a bargain to that effect with his governor. His debts had been paid, his commission had been sold, and he was to be shipped for Queensland. But he was to have one more winter with the B and B. An open, good-humoured, shrewd youth was Lieutenant Cox, who suffered nothing from false shame, and was intelligent enough to know that life at the rate of £1,200 a year, with £400 to spend, must come to an end. Fred Pepper was a young man of about forty-five, who had hunted with the B and B, and lived at the Moonbeam from a time beyond which the memory of Mr. Horsball's present customers went not. He was

the father of the Moonbeam, Mr. Horsball himself having come there since the days in which Fred Pepper first became familiar with its loose boxes. No one knew how he lived or how he got his horses. He had, however, a very pretty knack of selling them, and certainly paid Mr. Horsball regularly. He was wont to vanish in April, and would always turn up again in October. Some people called him the dormouse. He was good-humoured, good-looking after a horsey fashion, clever, agreeable, and quite willing to submit himself to any nickname that could be found for him. He liked a rubber of whist, and was supposed to make something out of bets with bad players. He rode very carefully, and was altogether averse to ostentation and bluster in the field. But he could make a horse do anything when he wanted to sell him, and could on an occasion give a lead as well as any man. Everybody liked him, and various things were constantly said in his praise. He was never known to borrow a sovereign. He had been known to lend a horse. He did not drink. He was a very safe man in the field. He did not lie outrageously in selling his horses. He did not cheat at cards. As long as he had a drop of drink left in his flask he would share it with any friend. He never boasted. He was much given to chaff, but his chaff was good-humoured. He was generous with his cigars. Such were his virtues. That he had no adequate means of his own, and that he never earned a penny, that he lived chiefly by gambling, that he had no pursuit in life but pleasure, that he never went inside a church, that he never gave away a shilling, that he was of no use to any human being, and that no one could be-

lieve a word he said of himself,—these were specks upon his character. Taken as a whole, Fred Pepper was certainly very popular with the gentlemen and ladies of B and B.

Ralph Newton, when he dropped down upon the Moonbeam, was made loudly welcome. Mr. Horsball, whose bill for £500 had been honoured at its first day of maturity, not a little, perhaps, to his own surprise, treated Ralph almost as a hero. When Ralph made some reference to the remainder of the money due, Mr. Horsball expressed himself as quite shocked at the allusion. He had really had the greatest regret in asking Mr. Newton for his note of hand, and would not have done it, had not an unforeseen circumstance called upon him suddenly to make up a few thousands. He had felt very much obliged to Mr. Newton for his prompt kindness. There needn't be a word about the remainder, and if Mr. Newton wanted something specially good for the next season,—as of course he would,—Mr. Horsball had just the horse that would suit him. "You'll about want a couple more, Mr. Newton," said Mr. Horsball.

Then Ralph told something of his plans to this Master of the Studs,—something, but not much. He said nothing of the sale of his property, and nothing quite definite as to that one horse with which his hunting was to be done for the future. "I'm going to turn over a new leaf, Horsball," he said.

"Not going to be spliced, squire?"

"Well;—I can't say that I am, but I won't say that I ain't. But I'm certainly going to make a change which will take me away from your fatherly care."

"I'm sorry for that, squire. We think we've always taken great care of you here."

"The very best in the world;—but a man must settle down in the world some day, you know. I want a nice bit of land, a hundred and fifty acres, or something of that sort."

"To purchase, squire?"

"I don't care whether I buy it or take it on lease. But it mustn't be in this county. I am too well known here, and should always want to be out when I ought to be looking after the stock."

"You'll take the season out of yourself first, at any rate," said Mr. Horsball. Ralph shook his head, but Mr. Horsball felt nearly sure of his customer for the ensuing winter. It is not easy for a man to part with four horses, seven or eight saddles, an establishment of bridles, horse-sheets, spurs, rollers, and bandages, a pet groom, a roomful of top boots, and leather breeches beyond the power of counting. This is a wealth which it is easy to increase, but of which it is very difficult to get quit.

"I think I shall sell," said Ralph.

"We'll talk about that in April," said Mr. Horsball.

He went out cub-hunting three or four times, and spent the intermediate days playing dummy whist with Fred Pepper and Cox,—who was no longer a lieutenant. Ralph felt that this was not the sort of beginning for his better life which would have been most appropriate; but then he hardly had an opportunity of beginning that better life quite at once. He must wait till something more definite had been done about the property,—and, above all things, till Sir Thomas

should be back from canvassing. He did, however, so far begin his better life as to declare that the points at whist must be low,—shilling points, with half-a-crown on the rubber. "Quite enough for this kind of thing," said Fred Pepper. "We only want just something to do." And Ralph, when at the end of the week he had lost only a matter of fifteen pounds, congratulated himself on having begun his better life. Cox and Fred Pepper, who divided the trifle between them, laughed at the bagatelle.

But before he left the Moonbeam things had assumed a shape which, when looked at all round, was not altogether pleasant to him. Before he had been three days at the place he received a letter from his lawyer, telling him that his uncle had given his formal assent to the purchase, and had offered to pay the stipulated sum as soon as Ralph would be willing to receive it. As to any further sum that might be forthcoming, a valuer should be agreed upon at once. The actual deed of sale and transfer would be ready by the middle of November; and the lawyer advised Ralph to postpone his acceptance of the money till that deed should have been executed. It was evident from the letter that there was no need on his part to hurry back to town. This letter he found waiting for him on his return one day from hunting. There had been a pretty run, very fast, with a kill, as there will be sometimes in cub-hunting in October,—though as a rule, of all sports, cub-hunting is the sorriest. Ralph had ridden his favourite horse Brag, and Mr. Pepper had taken out,—just to try him,—a little animal of his that he had bought, as he said, quite at hap-hazard. He knew nothing about him, and was rather afraid

that he had been done. But the little horse seemed to have a dash of pace about him, and in the evening there was some talk of the animal. Fred Pepper thought that the little horse was faster than Brag. Fred Pepper never praised his own horses loudly; and when Brag's merits were chaunted, said that perhaps Ralph was right. Would Ralph throw his leg over the little horse on Friday and try him? On the Friday Ralph did throw his leg over the little horse, and there was another burst. Ralph was obliged to confess, as they came home together in the afternoon, that he had never been better carried. "I can see what he is now," said Fred Pepper;—"he is one of those little horses that one don't get every day. He's up to a stone over my weight, too." Now Ralph and Fred Pepper each rode thirteen stone and a half.

On that day they dined together, and there was much talk as to the future prospects of the men. Not that Fred Pepper said anything of his future prospects. No one ever presumed him to have a prospect, or suggested to him to look for one. But Cox had been very communicative and confidential, and Ralph had been prompted to say something of himself. Fred Pepper, though he had no future of his own, could be pleasantly interested about the future of another, and had quite agreed with Ralph that he ought to settle himself. The only difficulty was in deciding the when. Cox intended to settle himself too, but Cox was quite clear as to the wisdom of taking another season out of himself. He was prepared to prove that it would be sheer waste of time and money not to do so. "Here I am," said Cox, "and a fellow always saves money by staying where he is." There was a sparkle

of truth in this which Ralph Newton found himself unable to deny.

"You'll never have another chance," said Pepper.

"That's another thing," said Cox. "Of course I shan't. I've turned it round every side, and I know what I'm about. As for horses, I believe they sell better in April than they do in October. Men know what they are then." Fred Pepper would not exactly back this opinion, but he ventured to suggest that there was not so much difference as some men supposed.

"If you are to jump into the cold water," said Ralph, "you'd better take the plunge at once."

"I'd sooner do it in the summer than winter," said Fred Pepper.

"Of course," said Cox. "If you must give up hunting, do it at the end of the season, not at the beginning. There's a time for all things. Ring the bell, Dormouse, and we'll have another bottle of claret before we go to dummy."

"If I stay here for the winter," said Ralph, "I should want another horse. Though I might, perhaps, get through with four."

"Of course you might," said Pepper, who never spoilt his own market by pressing.

"I'd rather give up altogether than do it in a scratch way," said Ralph. "I've got into a fashion of having a second horse, and I like it."

"It's the greatest luxury in the world," said Cox.

"I never tried it," said Pepper; "I'm only too happy to get one." It was admitted by all men that Fred Pepper had the art of riding his horses without tiring them.

They played their rubber of whist and had a little hot whiskey and water. On this evening Mr. Horsball was admitted to their company and made a fourth. But he wouldn't bet. Shilling points, he said, were quite as much as he could afford. Through the whole evening they went on talking of the next season, of the absolute folly of giving up one thing before another was begun, and of the merits of Fred Pepper's little horse. "A clever little animal, Mr. Pepper," said the great man, "a very clever little animal; but I wish you wouldn't bring so many clever un's down here, Mr. Pepper."

"Why not, Horsball?" asked Cox.

"Because he interferes with my trade," said Mr. Horsball, laughing. It was supposed, nevertheless, that Mr. Horsball and Mr. Pepper quite understood each other. Before the evening was over, a price had been fixed, and Ralph had bought the little horse for £130. Why shouldn't he take another winter out of himself? He could not marry Mary Bonner and get into a farm all in a day,—nor yet all in a month. He would go to work honestly with a view of settling himself; but let him be as honest about it as he might, his winter's hunting would not interfere with him. So at last he assured himself. And then he had another argument strong in his favour. He might hunt all the winter and yet have this thirty thousand pounds,—nay, more than thirty thousand pounds at the end of it. In fact, imprudent and foolish as had been his hunting in all previous winters, there would not even be any imprudence in this winter's hunting. Fortified by all these unanswerable arguments he did buy Mr. Fred Pepper's little horse.

On the next morning, the morning of the day on which he was to return to town, the arguments did not seem to be so irresistible, and he almost regretted what he had done. It was not that he would be ruined by another six months' fling at life. Situated as he now was so much might be allowed to him almost without injury. But then how can a man trust in his own resolutions before he has begun to keep them,—when, at the very moment of beginning, he throws them to the winds for the present, postponing everything for another hour? He knew as well as any one could tell him that he was proving himself to be unfit for that new life which he was proposing to himself. When one man is wise and another foolish, the foolish man knows generally as well as does the wise man in what lies wisdom and in what folly. And the temptation often is very slight. Ralph Newton had hardly wished to buy Mr. Pepper's little horse. The balance of desire during the whole evening had lain altogether on the other side. But there had come a moment in which he had yielded, and that moment governed all the other minutes. We may almost say that a man is only as strong as his weakest moment.

But he returned to London very strong in his purpose. He would keep his establishment at the Moonbeam for this winter. He had it all laid out and planned in his mind. He would at once pay Mr. Horsball the balance of the old debt, and count on the value of his horses to defray the expense of the coming season. And he would, without a week's delay, make his offer to Mary Bonner. A dim idea of some feeling of disappointment on Clary's part did cross his brain,—a feeling which seemed to threaten some slight

discomfort to himself as resulting from want of sympathy on her part; but he must assume sufficient courage to brave this. That he would in any degree be an evil-doer towards Clary,—that did not occur to him. Nor did it occur to him as at all probable that Mary Bonner would refuse his offer. In these days men never expect to be refused. It has gone forth among young men as a doctrine worthy of perfect faith, that young ladies are all wanting to get married, —looking out for lovers with an absorbing anxiety, and that few can dare to refuse any man who is justified in proposing to them.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The new Heir counts his Chickens.

THE Squire was almost lost in joy when he received his son's letter, telling him that Ralph the heir had consented to sell everything. The one great wish of his life was to be accomplished at last! The property was to be his own, so that he might do what he liked with it, so that he might leave it entire to his own son, so that for the remainder of his life he might enjoy it in that community with his son which had always appeared to him to be the very summit of human bliss. From the sweet things which he had seen he had been hitherto cut off by the record of his own fault, and had spent the greater part of his life in the endurance of a bitter punishment. He had been torn to pieces, too, in contemplating the modes of escape from the position in which his father's very natural will had placed him. He might of course have married, and at least have expected and have hoped for children. But in that there would have been misery. His son was the one human being that was dear to him above all others, and by such a marriage he would have ruined his son. Early in life, comparatively early, he had made up his mind that he would not do that;—that he would save his money, and make a property for the boy he loved. But then it had come home to him as a fact, that he could be happy in preparing no other home for his son than this old family house of his, with all its acres, woods, and homesteads. The acres, woods, and homesteads gave to him no delight, feeling as he did every

hour of his life that they were not his own for purposes of a real usufruct. Then by degrees he had heard of his nephew's follies, and the idea had come upon him that he might buy his nephew out. Ralph, his own Ralph, had told him that the idea was cruel; but he could not see the cruelty. "What a bad man loses a good man will get," he said; "and surely it must be better for all those who are to live by the property that a good man should be the master of it." He would not interfere, nor would he have any power of interfering, till others would interfere were he to keep aloof. The doings would be the doings of that spendthrift heir, and none of his. When Ralph would tell him that he was cruel, he would turn away in wrath; but hiding his wrath because he loved his son. But now everything was set right, and his son had had the doing of it.

He was nearly mad with joy throughout that day as he thought of the great thing which he had accomplished. He was alone in the house, for his son was still in London, and during the last few months guests had been unfrequent at the Priory. But he did not wish to have anybody with him now. He went out, roaming through the park, and realizing to himself the fact that now, at length, the very trees were his own. He gazed at one farmhouse after another, not seeking the tenants, hardly speaking to them if he met them, but with his brain full of plans of what should be done. He saw Gregory for a moment, but only nodded at him smiling, and passed on. He was not in a humour just at present to tell his happiness to any one. He walked all round Darvell's premises, the desolate, half-ruined house of Brumbys, telling himself that very

shortly it should be desolate and half-ruined no longer. Then he crossed into the lane, and stood with his eyes fixed upon Brownriggs,—Walker's farm, the pearl of all the farms in those parts, the land with which he thought he could have parted so easily when the question before him was that of becoming in truth the owner of any portion of the estate. But now, every acre was ten times dearer to him than it had been then. He would never part with Brownriggs. He would even save Ingram's farm, in Twining, if it might possibly be saved. He had not known before how dear to him could be every bank, every tree, every sod. Yes;—now in very truth he was lord and master of the property which had belonged to his father, and his father's fathers before him. He would borrow money, and save it during his lifetime. He would do anything rather than part with an acre of it, now that the acres were his own to leave behind him to his son.

On the following day Ralph arrived. We must no longer call him Ralph who was not the heir. He would be heir to everything from the day that the contract was completed! The Squire, though he had longed to see the young man as he had never longed before, would not go to the station to meet the welcome one. His irrepressible joy was too great to be exhibited before strangers. He remained at home in his own room, desiring that Mr. Ralph might come to him there. He would not even show himself in the hall. And yet when Ralph entered the room he was very calm. There was a bright light in his eyes, but at first he spoke hardly a word. "So, you've managed that little job," he said, as he took his son's hand.

"I managed nothing, sir," said Ralph, smiling.

"Didn't you? I thought you had managed a good deal. It is done, anyway."

"Yes, sir, it's done. At least, I suppose so." Ralph, after sending his telegram, had of course written to his father, giving him full particulars of the manner in which the arrangement had been made.

"You don't mean that there is any doubt," said the Squire, with almost an anxious tone.

"Not at all, as far as I know. The lawyers seem to think that it is all right. Ralph is quite in earnest."

"He must be in earnest," said the Squire.

"He has behaved uncommonly well," said the namesake. "So well that I think you owe him much. We were quite mistaken in supposing that he wanted to drive a sharp bargain." He himself had never so supposed, but he found this to be the best way of speaking of that matter to his father.

"I will forgive him everything now," said the Squire, "and will do anything that I can to help him."

Ralph said many things in praise of his namesake. He still almost regretted what had been done. At any rate he could see the pity of it. It was that other Ralph who should have been looked to as the future proprietor of Newton Priory, and not he, who was hardly entitled to call himself a Newton. It would have been more consistent with the English order of things that it should be so. And then there was so much to say in favour of this young man who had lost it all, and so little to say against him! And it almost seemed to him for whose sake the purchase was being made, that advantage,—an unscrupulous if not an unfair advantage,—was being taken of the purchaser. He could

not say all this to his father; but he spoke of Ralph in such a way as to make his father understand what he thought. "He is such a pleasant fellow," said Ralph, who was now the heir.

"Let us have him down here as soon as the thing is settled."

"Ah;—I don't think he'll come now. Of course he's wretched enough about it. It is not wonderful that he should have hesitated at parting with it."

"Perhaps not," said the Squire, who was willing to forgive past sins; "but of course there was no help for it."

"That was when he didn't feel so sure about when he declined your first offer. It was not that he objected to the price. As to the price he says that of course he can say nothing about it. When I told him that you were willing to raise your offer, he declared that he would take nothing in that fashion. If those who understood the matter said that more was coming to him, he supposed that he would get it. According to my ideas he behaved very well, sir."

In this there was something that almost amounted to an accusation against the Squire. At least so the Squire felt it; and the feeling for the moment robbed him of something of his triumph. According to his own view there was no need for pity. It was plain that to his son the whole affair was pitiful. But he could not scold his son;—at any rate not now. "I feel this, Ralph," he said;—"that from this moment everybody connected with the property, every tenant on it and every labourer, will be better off than they were a month ago. I may have been to blame. I say nothing about that. But I do say that in all cases it

is well that a property should go to the natural heir of the life-tenant. Of course it has been my fault," he added after a pause; "but I do feel now that I have in a great measure remedied the evil which I did." The tone now had become too serious to admit of further argument. Ralph, feeling that this was so, pressed his father's hand and left him. "Gregory is coming across to dinner," said the Squire as Ralph was closing the door behind him.

At that time Gregory had received no intimation of what had been done in London, his brother's note not reaching him till the following morning. Ralph met him before the Squire came down, and the news was soon told. "It is all settled," said Ralph, with a sigh.

"Well?"

"Your brother has agreed to sell."

"No!"

"I have almost more pain than pleasure in it myself, because I know it will make you unhappy."

"He was so confident when he wrote to me!"

"Yes;—but he explained all that. He had hoped then that he could have saved it. But the manner of saving it would have been worse than the loss. He will tell you everything, no doubt. No man could have behaved better." As it happened, there was still some little space of time before the Squire joined them,—a period perhaps of five minutes. But the parson spoke hardly a word. The news which he now heard confounded him. He had been quite sure that his brother had been in earnest, and that his uncle would fail. And then, though he loved the one Ralph nearly as well as he did the other,—though he

must have known that Ralph the base-born was in all respects a better man than his own brother, more of a man than the legitimate heir,—still to his feelings that legitimacy was everything. He too was a Newton of Newton; but it may be truly said to him that there was nothing selfish in his feelings. To be the younger brother of Newton of Newton, and parson of the parish which bore the same name as themselves, was sufficient for his ambition. But things would be terribly astray now that the right heir was extruded. Ralph, this Ralph whom he loved so well, could not be the right Newton to own the property. The world would not so regard him. The tenants would not so think of him. The county would not so repute him. To the thinking of parson Gregory, a great misfortune had been consummated. As soon as he had realized it, he was silent and could speak no more.

Nor did Ralph say a word. Not to triumph in what had been done on his behalf,—or at least not to seem to triumph,—that was the lesson which he had taught himself. He fully sympathised with Gregory; and therefore he stood silent and sad by his side. That there must have been some triumph in his heart it is impossible not to imagine. It could not be but that he should be alive to the glory of being the undoubted heir to Newton Priory. And he understood well that his birth would interfere but little now with his position. Should he choose to marry, as he would choose, it would of course be necessary that he should explain his birth; but it was not likely, he thought, that he should seek a wife among those who would reject him, with all his other advantages, because he had no just title to his father's name. That he should

take joy in what had been done on his behalf was only natural; but as he stood with Gregory, waiting for his father to come to them, he showed no sign of joy. At last the Squire came. There certainly was triumph in his eye, but he did not speak triumphantly. It was impossible that some word should not be spoken between them as to the disposition of the property. "I suppose Ralph has told you," he said, "what he has done up in London?"

"Yes;—he has told me," said Gregory.

"I hope there will now be an end of all family ill-feeling among us," said the uncle. "Your brother shall be as welcome at the old place as I trust you have always found yourself. If he likes to bring his horses here, we shall be delighted."

The parson muttered something as to the kindness with which he had ever been treated, but what he said was said with an ill-grace. He was almost broken-hearted, and thoroughly wished himself back in his own solitude. The Squire saw it all, and did not press him to talk;—said not a word more of his purchase, and tried to create some little interest about parish matters;—asked after the new building in the chancel, and was gracious about this old man and that young woman. But Gregory could not recover himself,—could not recall his old interests, or so far act a part as to make it seem that he was not thinking of the misfortune which had fallen upon the family. In every look of his eyes and every tone of his voice he was telling his son that he was a bastard, and the father that he was destroying the inheritance of the family. But yet they bore with him, and endeavoured to win him back to pleasantness. Soon after the

cloth was taken away he took his leave. He had work to do at home, he said, and must go. His uncle went out with him into the hall, leaving Ralph alone in the parlour. "It will be for the best in the long run," said the Squire, with his hand on his nephew's shoulder.

"Perhaps it may, sir. I am not pretending to say. Good night." As he walked home across the park, through the old trees which he had known since he was an infant, he told himself that it could not be for the best that the property should be sent adrift, out of the proper line. The only thing to be desired now was that neither he nor his brother should have a child, and that there should no longer be a proper line.

The Squire's joy was too deep and well founded to be in any way damped by poor Gregory's ill-humour, and was too closely present to him for him to be capable of restraining it. Why should he restrain himself before his son? "I am sorry for Greg," he said, "because he has old-fashioned ideas. But of course it will be for the best. His brother would have squandered every acre of it." To this Ralph made no answer. It might probably have been as his father said. It was perhaps best for all who lived in and by the estate that he should be the heir. And gradually the feeling of exultation in his own position was growing upon him. It was natural that it should do so. He knew himself to be capable of filling with credit, and with advantage to all around him, the great place which was now assigned to him, and it was impossible that he should not be exultant. And he owed it to his father to show him that he ap-

preciated all that had been done for him. "I think he ought to have the £35,000 at least," said the Squire.

"Certainly," said Ralph.

"I think so. As for the bulk sum, I have already written to Carey about that. No time ought to be lost. There is no knowing what might happen. He might die."

"He doesn't look like dying, sir."

"He might break his neck out hunting. There is no knowing. At any rate there should be no delay. From what I am told I don't think that with the timber and all they'll make it come to another £5,000; but he shall have that. As he has behaved well, I'll show him that I can behave well too. I've half a mind to go up to London, and stay till it's all through."

"You'd only worry yourself."

"I should worry myself, no doubt. And do you know, I love the place so much better than I did, that I can hardly bear to tear myself away from it. The first mark of my handiwork, now that I can work, shall be put upon Davell's farm. I'll have the old place about his ears before I am a day older."

"You'll not get it through before winter."

"Yes, I will. If it costs me an extra £50 I shan't begrudge it. It shall be a sort of memorial building, a farmhouse of thanksgiving. I'll make it as snug a place as there is about the property. It has made me wretched for these two years."

"I hope all that kind of wretchedness will be over now."

"Thank God;—yes. I was looking at Brown-

riggs to-day,—and Ingram's. I don't think we'll sell either. I have a plan, and I think we can pull through without it. It is so much easier to sell than to buy."

"You'd be more comfortable if you sold one of them."

"Of course I must borrow a few thousands;—but why not? I doubt whether at this moment there's a property in all Hampshire so free as this. I have always lived on less than the income, and I can continue to do so easier than before. You are provided for now, old fellow."

"Yes, indeed;—and why should you pinch yourself?"

"I shan't be pinched. I haven't got a score of women about me, as you'll have before long. There's nothing in the world like having a wife. I am quite sure of that. But if you want to save money, the way to do it is not to have a nursery. You'll marry, of course, now?"

"I suppose I shall some day."

"The sooner the better. Take my word for it."

"Perhaps you'd alter your opinion if I came upon you before Christmas for your sanction."

"No, by Jove; that I shouldn't. I should be delighted. You don't mean to say you've got anybody in your eye. There's only one thing I ask, Ralph;—open out-and-out confidence."

"You shall have it, sir."

"There is somebody, then."

"Well; no; there isn't anybody. It would be impudence in me to say there was."

"Then I know there is." Upon this encourage-

ment Ralph told his father that on his two last visits to London he had seen a girl whom he thought that he would like to ask to be his wife. He had been at Fulham on three or four occasions,—it was so he put it, but his visits had, in truth, been only three,—and he thought that this niece of Sir Thomas Underwood possessed every charm that a woman need possess,—"except money," said Ralph. "She has no fortune, if you care about that."

"I don't care about money," said the Squire. "It is for the man to have that;—at any rate for one so circumstanced as you." The end of all this was that Ralph was authorised to please himself. If he really felt that he liked Miss Bonner well enough, he might ask her to be his wife to-morrow.

"The difficulty is to get at her," said Ralph.

"Ask the uncle for his permission. That's the manliest and the fittest way to do it. Tell him everything. Take my word for it he won't turn his face against you. As for me, nothing on earth would make me so happy as to see your children. If there were a dozen, I would not think them one too many. But mark you this, Ralph; it will be easier for us,—for you and me, if I live,—and for you without me if I go, to make all things clear and square and free while the bairns are little, than when they have to go to school and college, or perhaps want to get married."

"Ain't we counting our chickens before they are hatched?" said Ralph laughing.

When they parted for the night, which they did not do till after the Squire had slept for an hour on his chair, there was one other speech made,—a speech which Ralph was likely to remember to the latest day

of his life. His father had taken his candlestick in his right hand, and had laid his left upon his son's collar. "Ralph," said he, "for the first time in my life I can look you in the face, and not feel a pang of remorse. You will understand it when you have a son of your own. Good-night, my boy." Then he hurried off without waiting to hear a word, if there was any word that Ralph could have spoken.

On the next morning they were both out early at Darvell's farm, surrounded by bricklayers and carpenters, and before the week was over the work was in progress. Poor Darvell, half elated and half troubled, knew but little of the cause of this new vehemence. Something we suppose he did know, for the news was soon spread over the estate that the Squire had bought out Mr. Ralph, and that this other Mr. Ralph was now to be Mr. Ralph the heir. That the old butler should not be told,—the butler who had lived in the house when the present Squire was a boy,—was out of the question; and though the communication had been made in confidence, the confidence was not hermetical. The Squire after all was glad that it should be so. The thing had to be made known,—and why not after this fashion? Among the labourers and poor there was no doubt as to the joy felt. That other Mr. Ralph, who had always been up in town, was unknown to them, and this Mr. Ralph had ever been popular with them all. With the tenants the feeling was perhaps more doubtful. "I wish you joy, Mr. Newton, with all my heart," said Mr. Walker, who was the richest and most intelligent among them. "The Squire has worked for you like a man, and I hope it will come to good."

"I will do my best," said Ralph.

"I am sure you will. There will be a feeling, you know. You mustn't be angry at that."

"I understand," said Ralph.

"You won't be vexed with me for just saying so." Ralph promised that he would not be vexed, but he thought very much of what Mr. Walker had said to him. After all, such a property as Newton does not in England belong altogether to the owner of it. Those who live upon it, and are closely concerned in it with reference to all that they have in the world, have a part property in it. They make it what it is, and will not make it what it should be, unless in their hearts they are proud of it. "You know he can't be the real squire," said one old farmer to Mr. Walker. "They may hugger-mugger it this way and that; but this Mr. Ralph can't be like t'other young gentleman."

Nevertheless the Squire himself was very happy. These things were not said to him, and he had been successful. He took an interest in all things keener than he had felt for years past. One day he was in the stables with his son, and spoke about the hunting for the coming season. He had an Irish horse of which he was proud, an old hunter that had carried him for the last seven years, and of which he had often declared that under no consideration would he part with it. "Dear old fellow," he said, putting his hand on the animal's neck, "you shall work for your bread one other winter, and then you shall give over for the rest of your life."

"I never saw him look better," said Ralph.

"He's like his master;—not quite so young as he

was once. He never made a mistake yet that I know of."

Ralph when he saw how full of joy was his father, could not but rejoice also that the thing so ardently desired had been at last accomplished.

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